

*BY THE SAME AUTHOR.*

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ESSAYS TOWARDS A CRITICAL METHOD.  
NEW ESSAYS TOWARDS A CRITICAL METHOD.  
MONTAIGNE AND SHAKSPERE.  
BUCKLE AND HIS CRITICS: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY.  
THE SAXON AND THE CELT: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY.  
MODERN HUMANISTS: STUDIES OF CARLYLE, MILL,  
EMERSON, ARNOLD, RUSKIN, AND SPENCER.  
THE FALLACY OF SAVING: A STUDY IN ECONOMICS.  
THE EIGHT HOURS QUESTION: A STUDY IN ECONOMICS.  
THE DYNAMICS OF RELIGION: AN ESSAY IN ENGLISH  
CULTURE HISTORY. (By "M. W. Wiseman".)  
A SHORT HISTORY OF FREETHOUGHT, ANCIENT  
AND MODERN.  
A SHORT HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY.  
CHRISTIANITY AND MYTHOLOGY.  
STUDIES IN RELIGIOUS FALLACY.  
LETTERS ON REASONING.  
AN INTRODUCTION TO ENGLISH POLITICS.  
PATRIOTISM AND EMPIRE.  
WRECKING THE EMPIRE.

# CRITICISMS

BY

JOHN M. ROBERTSON

SECOND FAGGOT

LONDON

A. AND H. B. BONNER  
1 & 2 TOOK'S COURT, E.C.

1903



## **CRITICISMS**

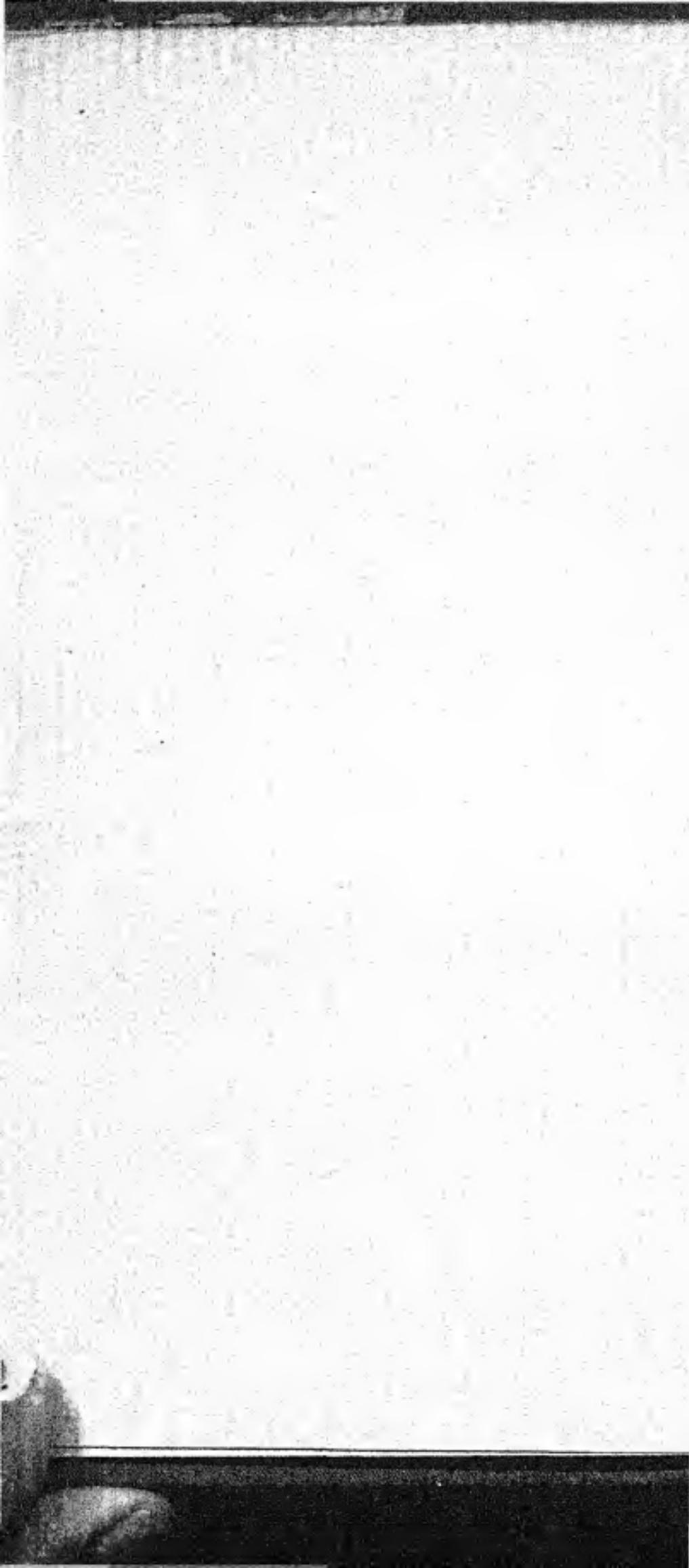
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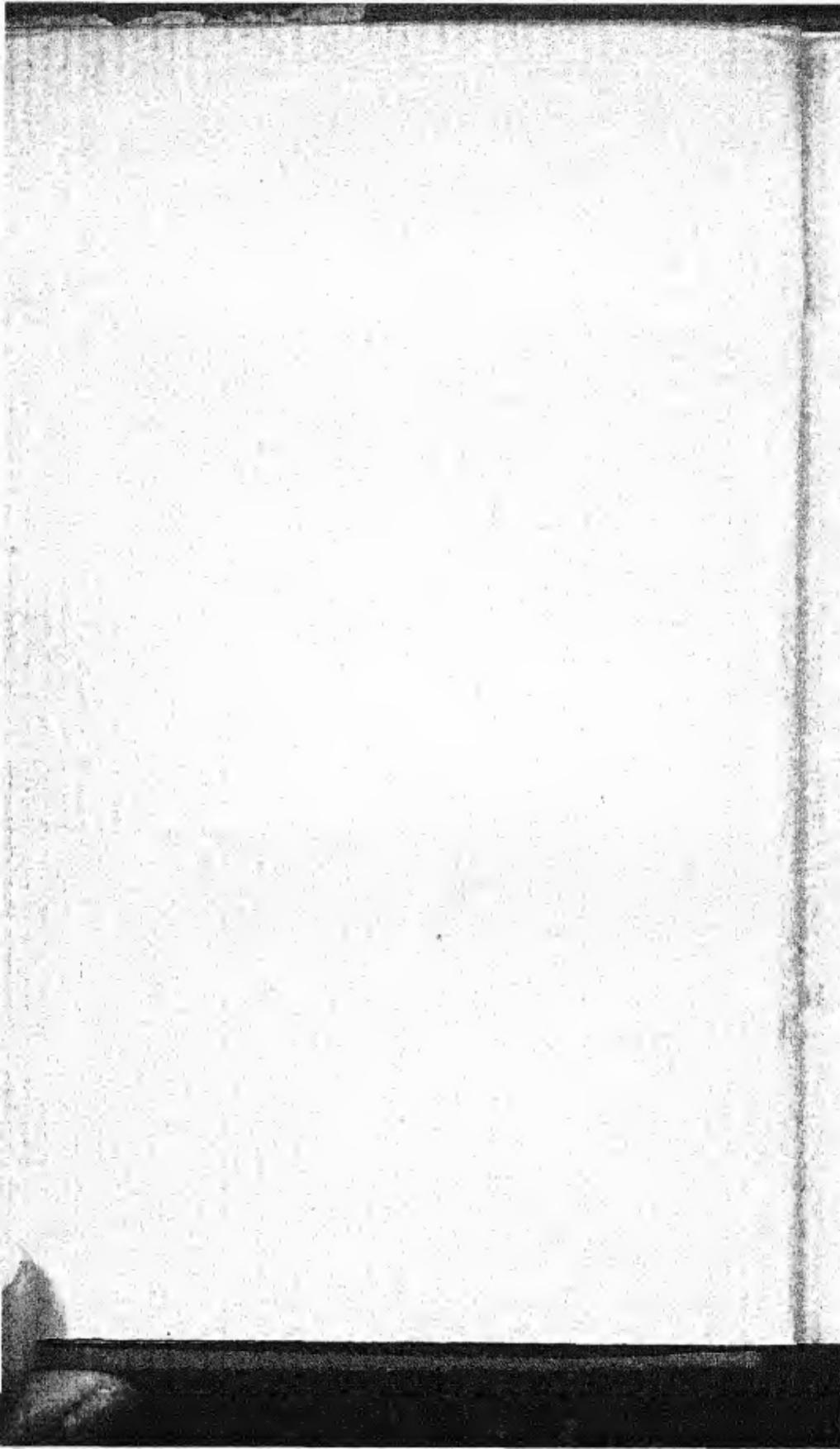
THE following papers are all reprints, more or less inexact. I am naturally the last person to lay any invidious stress on the fact that the periodicals in which they originally appeared are now without exception defunct; but the acknowledgment seems fair, as well as expedient by way of explaining the absence of "the usual acknowledgments". For the act of reprinting there are several excuses, of which perhaps the best is that in even the most juvenile papers there are some things that seem to need reaffirming.

J. M. R.



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## CRITICISMS.

### ORATORS' ENGLISH.

(1889.)

IN these pages,\* happily, we have nothing to do with politics. For that very reason we are at liberty to deal freely with a matter which, relating as it does to politics in the concrete, cannot be discussed freely or dispassionately in the political journals—the question, namely, of the technical or artistic merits of oratorical English, or of particular examples of oratory, which in the nature of things have to be drawn from the speeches either of politicians or of preachers. Now, pulpit oratory is for many reasons difficult of discussion on strictly artistic grounds, whereas the same difficulties do not arise in the case of the political platform ; and yet for obvious reasons the political journals cannot be looked to for any really impartial and disinterested criticism of platform work. Each side tends to make much of its own performers, and in general to make light of those on the other side ; and even when, as at the death of an eminent orator, the courtesies of strife prescribe generosity of acknowledgment all round, the political journal is not the place for a straight-

\* Those of the *Scottish Art Review*.

forward examination of the strictly literary merits of the deceased. The political point of view is not the literary, or the artistic, or the scientific.

No suspicion of this, however, deters politicians and their journals from passing the most definite judgments, not only on a dead orator's merits as orator, but on the merits of his oratory in relation to general literature. Illustration lies to hand in the speeches and articles on the late John Bright, to whose memory be all honor. There being complete agreement, to start with, as to his consummate power as an orator, we have had many judgments to the effect that he was not only one of the greatest public speakers, or indeed the greatest, of his period, but one of the great names in English literature on that account. Something like this was said long ago by Professor Thorold Rogers in his preface to his excellent collection of Mr. Bright's speeches.

"Nothing," said the Professor, "which can be found in English literature will aid the aspirant after (*sic!*) this great faculty [of public speaking] more than the careful and reiterated perusal of the speeches contained in this volume. . . . This is not the occasion on which to point out the causes which confer so great an artistic value on these compositions; which give them now, and will give them hereafter, so high a place in English literature. . . . A century hence [English] will probably be the speech of nearly half the inhabitants of the globe. I think that no master of that language will occupy a loftier position than Mr. Bright; that no speaker will teach with greater exactness the noblest and rarest of the social arts, the art of clear and persuasive exposition."

The first reflection suggested by these remarks

is, that Mr. Bright's literary influence for good is at least not well exemplified in his editor, seeing that "aspirant after a faculty" and "causes which confer value" are not happy specimens of English: the next comment is that the "art of clear and persuasive exposition", or of eloquence of any kind, can never be acquired from the study of any written eloquence whatever; and the next, that Cobden had perhaps a greater gift of exposition than Bright, though he is never classed as a great orator. Professor Rogers makes the inveterate mistake of empirical criticism in supposing that the surest way to do a thing well is to get by heart the way in which it has been successfully done by others. If he had but asked himself whether Bright acquired *his* powers by the "careful and reiterated perusal" of the speeches of earlier orators, the sentences quoted would surely have been otherwise written.

But a more distinguished authority than Professor Rogers has lately endorsed the judgment that Bright is a great influence in English literature. "One of the chief guardians amongst us of the purity of the English tongue" was one of the tributes paid by Mr. Gladstone to his old friend's memory in the House of Commons. Such a judgment would seem to imply, however modestly, that all our leading orators are in some degree "guardians of the purity of the English tongue". And yet it was in this very speech that

Mr. Gladstone, as reported by a Gladstonian journal of good standing, delivered himself of this passage: "The supreme eulogy which is his due I apprehend to be this, that he *elevated* political life to a *higher elevation*, to a *higher zenith*, to a *loftier standard*." *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?*

The eulogy which is really John Bright's due as an orator I humbly apprehend to be this: that being a man of warm and deep feeling, strongly moved by certain political issues of his time, and being happily unburdened with either conventional notions of oratory or academic habits of expression, he turned his gift of public speech to account with a directness and a force not previously common in even the best English oratory. This being so, his speeches are extremely effective even when read, not because he is a "great master" of English prose in the sense in which Browne, and Hobbes, and Swift, and Burke, and De Quincey, and Newman, and Ruskin are so, but because in reading him we imagine the words to be spoken, and feel how powerful the utterance is in comparison with the ordinary run of speeches. It is really impossible that oratory proper should yield as high style-values as choicely wrought prose, and just as impossible that it should be in any practical sense a force guarding the "purity of English". What does the latter claim mean? That Bright never used an unfit or awkward expression or construction? or that he set his face against neologisms? Either way it amounts to

little. Bright was indeed incapable of such a series of unspeakable tautologies as that above cited from Mr. Gladstone; he was saved from such performances by having only an ordinary stock of words at command, so that when he was at a loss for a word he could not "fill up a pause" with others, as Mr. Gladstone was long ago said to do, but he was no faultless master of platform elocution. And just as little was he, what many people so often declare him to be, a scrupulous cultivator of the "Saxon" element in his mother-tongue. If this is what Mr. Gladstone meant by his reference to "purity", he was wrong, as a study of the printed speeches will show. Bright would not have been the orator he was had he not instinctively availed himself of the sonority and dignity which the Romance elements in English supply in so much fuller a degree than the Saxon. Take a sentence from his speeches at random, and it will be found that as a rule he uses at least an average proportion of Latin-derived terms.

"There is not a country in the world that would not have been bankrupt long since, and plunged into irretrievable ruin, if the military authorities had been allowed to determine the amount of military force to be kept up, and the amount of revenue to be devoted to that purpose."—*Speech on India*, iv (Author's pop. ed., p. 49).

"Educate the people of India, govern them wisely, and gradually the distinctions of caste will disappear, and they will look upon us rather as benefactors than as conquerors" (*India*, i).

Nay, he at times added phrase to phrase for the

sake of the effects of Latin terms only, as here : “ There was never a more *docile people*, never a more *tractable nation* ” (*ib.*) ; and he could at times entirely lose force in the effort at sound, as in the sentence : “ Let the Government do that, and there is not a corner in India into which the intelligence would not *penetrate with the rapidity of lightning.* ” (*India*, ii.) His special success lay in the effective alternation of terseness and simplicity with volume of diction ; but when he perorated he was to the full as voluminous as the typical Parliamentary orator, with the advantage of being considerably more strenuous. In the main, he forced attention by nervous directness, as thus : “ People may fancy that this does not matter much ; but I say it matters very much.” “ You must change all this if you mean to keep India.” “ There we are, we do not know how to leave it, and therefore let us see if we know how to govern it.” But no man knew better how to follow up a sharp saying with a roll of vocables which should lend it moral impressiveness.

“ It is said that ‘the City’ joins in this feeling. . . . Well, I never knew the City to be right. Men who are deep in great monetary transactions, and who are steeped to the lips sometimes in perilous speculations, are not able to take broad and dispassionate views of political questions of this nature ” (*Canada*, i, p. 67).

And that he relied constantly and consciously on the sonority of Latinic terms for his most imposing effects might be shown by the citation of a

score of his perorations. Take one of the most memorable :

"I am not, nor did I ever pretend to be, a statesman ; and that character is so tainted and equivocal in our day that I am not sure that a pure and honorable ambition would aspire to it. I have not enjoyed for thirty years, like these noble Lords, the honors and emoluments of office. I have not set my sails to every passing breeze. I am a plain and simple citizen, sent here by one of the foremost constituents of the empire, representing feebly, perhaps, but honestly, I dare aver, the opinions of very many, and the true interests of all those who have sent me here. Let it not be said that I am alone in my condemnation of this war, and of this incapable and guilty administration. And, even if I were alone, if mine were a solitary voice raised above the din of arms and the clamors of a venal press, I should have the consolation I have to-night—and which I trust will be mine to the last moment of my existence—the priceless consolation that no word of mine has tended to promote the squandering of my country's treasure or the spilling of one single drop of my country's blood" (*'Russia.'* ii, p. 246).

It will not be disputed that this is eloquence of a high quality, combining passion and majesty of diction with a skill that never detracts from perfect spontaneity of guise. But it is one thing to laud the orator for his success in his proper walk, and another to say that in virtue of his oratory he ranks with the great masters of written speech. The truth is, an orator's mastery of language tends to be disproportionately valued from the start on account simply of the incompetence of the great mass of public speaking. It being much more difficult to speak fluently and grammatically at length, than to put together respectable prose in black on white, the utterances

of most speakers, if faithfully reported, would represent a startling ineptitude in comparison with the poorest of newspaper writing. Our political conditions, indeed, tend to yield us good speakers rather by accident than by natural or other selection of speaking faculty ; but even among professional speakers, such as barristers, sound locution is not at all to be depended on. Of the able Sir Henry James, for instance, it is said that he never by any chance speaks a sentence of more than three clauses in proper syntax. Nor is charm of articulation a common grace among politicians. There are some members of the House of Commons who, it is probable, are perfectly intelligible only to their own families, so faulty are their mere organs of speech ; and it is the exception and not the rule to find the commonest principles of elocution mastered by those who most need them. When, therefore, a man arises who articulates nobly and constructs lucidly and easily, he is already secure of critical esteem ; and when he employs his powers movingly to great public ends he becomes, in Emerson's phrase, the true potentate, before whose fame all others must hush. But to the critical reader he remains a man who excels in public speaking, not a great master of language in the sense in which language is mastered by the great word-compellers of literature. That there should be any room for dispute on this head is due to our natural habit of imagining the reported speech actually spoken, and thus judging

it on its platform merits. If we but make the effort of assuming a spoken passage to be part of a letter, or of a written argument, we discover that the style of public speech has, and necessarily, certain qualities of diffuseness which would be blemishes in written prose. Any fair example of Bright will furnish general or special proof. As this :

" Suppose I stood at the foot of Vesuvius or Etna, and, seeing a hamlet or a homestead planted on its slope, I said to the dwellers in *that hamlet or that homestead*, *You see that vapor which ascends from the summit of the mountain. That vapor may become a dense, black smoke that will obscure the sky. You see that trickling of lava from the crevices or fissures in the side of the mountain. That trickling of lava may become a river of fire. You hear that muttering in the bowels of the mountain. That muttering may become a bellowing thunder, the voice of a violent convulsion that may shake half a continent. You know that at your feet is the grave of great cities for which there is no resurrection, as history tells us that aristocracies and dynasties have passed away, and their name has been known no more for ever. If I say this to the dwellers upon the slopes of the mountain, and if there comes hereafter a catastrophe which makes the world shudder, am I responsible for that catastrophe? I did not build the mountain, or fill it with explosive materials. I merely warned the men that were in danger" ("Reform,' xi, p. 396).*

Or this, in allusion to the people of India :

" I would tell them also in that Proclamation, that while the people of England hold that their own, the Christian religion, is true, and the best for mankind, yet that it is consistent with that religion that they who profess it should hold inviolable the rights of conscience and the rights of religion in others. I would show, that whatever violent, over-zealous, and fanatical men may have said in this country, the Parliament of England, the Ministers of the Queen, and the Queen herself, are resolved that upon this

point no kind of wrong should be done to the millions who profess the religions held to be true in India. I would do another thing," etc. ('India,' ii, p. 31.).

It is certain that if these very effective passages had first appeared as newspaper letters, or as leading articles with "we" for "I", they would have struck us as at once inflated and slipshod, whereas in the oratorical form they have just the broad laxity of style that is needed for the platform perspective. The repetitions, as "crevices or fissures", and "that hamlet or that homestead", count for little in the sweep of the main metaphor, which has to carry the multitude on its wave ; and the diffusion of a simple proposition through three or four iterative sentences is no fault where the proposition is politically weighty, and the audience includes all grades of receptivity. But who could live in such prose for a permanency, alongside of the tested and tempered structures of the great stylists?

If we can contrive to exclude for a moment the play of political sympathy or the general emotion of the arena, we shall find that the average spoken prose of even a great orator like Bright is pretty much the average prose of an average historian, only more diffuse. Bright's range and treatment of language are just the range and treatment of a good conventional writer like Lord Mahon or Dean Merivale : the syllabic and vocalic expedients are the same ; the vocabulary necessarily not more <sup>h</sup>tilised ; the doctrinal plane certainly not higher.

But inasmuch as the writer frames and corrects his phrase and syntax at his leisure, while the orator must generally compose as he speaks, the latter of necessity commits himself to a number of crudities of expression and lapses of logic which the penman escapes. This is quite inevitable. The speeches of great orators which have ostensibly come down to us from past generations do not furnish the proof, because these speeches were invariably recomposed for printing ; but the good verbatim reports of our present-day newspapers, and the merely corrected reprints of these, give the evidence in abundance. The point, indeed, is hardly worth illustrating, so certain is the fact. It is very obvious that Mr. Gladstone could not have written such a desperate string of tautologies as that above quoted from him ; and Sir Charles Russell would have worded differently the last sentence of his recent speech\* if he had had a minute's time to think. That speech appears to be accepted all round as masterly in its way ; but the close of the peroration consisted of a hope " that there will be dispelled, and dispelled for ever, the cloud, *the weighty cloud*, that has rested on the history of a noble race, and dimmed the glory of a mighty empire ". Sir Charles doubtless felt that " dark " was unsuitable because the cadence required a word of two or more syllables ; but he

\* In the trial of the *Times*' charges against Mr. Parnell, in 1889.

could not get the right dissyllable, and had to snatch at the wrong one, to the disaster of his metaphor. Mr. John Morley, again, is confessedly a skilled literary artist, but he lately uttered a peroration which consisted of a repeated assertion of the progress of progress. A public speaker must just make up his mind to these tumbles, even if, like Lord Salisbury, he speaks slowly with long pauses, and so misses oratorical success. Many mishaps, indeed, may be escaped by a habit of learning one's peroration by heart ; but this has its disadvantages, and the shortcomings of the platform code of style are sometimes queerly exemplified even in the perorations of Bright, which are understood to have been carefully planned, if not actually got by heart. Here, for instance, is one in which the slight thought is confused and the expression iterative and verbose to the point of final nonsense :

“ We know the cause of this revolt, *its purposes and its aims*. Those who made it have not left us in darkness respecting their intentions, but *what they are to accomplish is still hidden from our sight*; and I will abstain now, as I have always abstained with regard to it, from predicting *what is to come*. I know what I hope for—and what I shall rejoice in—but I know nothing of future facts that will enable me to express a confident opinion. Whether it will give freedom to the race which white men have trampled in the dust, and whether the issue will purify a nation steeped in crimes committed against that race, is known only to the Supreme. In His hands are alike the breath of man and the life of States. I am willing to commit to Him the issue of this dreaded contest; but I implore of Him, and I beseech this House, that my country may lift not hand nor voice in aid of the most stupendous act of guilt that *history*

*has recorded in the annals of mankind*" (*America*, vi, p. 143).

Of course the miscarriage of "*history has recorded in the annals of mankind*" is no worse than that of the progress of progress ; but whereas Mr. Morley certainly could not have passed his blunder in proof, the chances are that Bright failed to detect his, since the general grammatical accuracy of his printed speeches suggests that he would have removed any serious blemish if he saw it. And if he was capable of passing such a blot, it is clear he was not a thorough master of the English language. Nor was it a master of exposition in the higher sense, however great might be his success in the simpler forms of statement, who uttered this :

"I admit that this is a great work ; I admit also that the further I go into the consideration of this question the more I feel that it is *too large for me to grapple with*, and that *every step we take in it* should be taken as if we were *men walking in the dark*. We have, however, certain *great principles to guide us*, and by their light we may make *some steps in advance*, if not fast, at any rate sure. But we start from an unfortunate position. We start from a *platform of conquest by force of arms extending over a hundred years*" (*India*, ii, p. 29).

It would be difficult to find in prose literature a more unhappy confusion of metaphor, a more cumbrous evolution of image.

But it would be flagrantly unfair to leave an impression rather of the literary shortcomings than of the racy strength of Bright's oratorical style. At worst he was probably not more infeli-

citous than the most famous orators have at times been in speeches which we know only in their recomposed form ; certainly he has not made worse stumbles in diction than the academic Mr. Gladstone, or been guilty of such false taste as disfigures some of the speeches of the carefully phrasing Beaconsfield. It is necessary to guard against a wrong estimate of the literary standing of oratory ; but, the proper qualifications made, it is our business to derive from the orator's printed performance all the pleasure it can rightly yield us. And we must be hypercritical or *blasé* indeed if we are hindered by a sense of the occasional default of literary form from enjoying such a piece of speaking as this :

"The right honorable gentleman below me (Mr. Horsman) said a little against the Government and a little against the Bill, but had last night a field night for an attack upon so humble an individual as I am. The right honorable gentleman is the first of the new party who has expressed his great grief, who has retired into what might be called his political Cave of Adullum, and he has called about him everyone that was in distress, and everyone that was discontented. The right honorable gentleman has been anxious to form a party in this House. There is scarcely anyone on this side of the House who is able to address the House with effect, or to take much part in our debates, whom he has not tried to bring over to his party or cabal ; and at last the right honorable gentleman has succeeded in hooking the right honorable gentleman the member for Calne (Mr. Lowe). I know there was an opinion expressed many years ago by a member of the Treasury Bench and of the Cabinet, that two men would make a party. When a party is formed of two men so amiable, so discreet, as the two right honorable gentlemen, we may hope to see for the first time in Parliament a party perfectly harmonious, and distinguished by mutual and

unbroken trust. But there is one difficulty which it is impossible to remove. This party of two reminds me of the Scotch terrier, which was so covered with hair that you could not tell which was the head and which was the tail of it.

"The right honorable the member for Calne told us that he had some peculiar election experiences. There are men who make discord wherever they appear. The right honorable gentleman on going down to Kidderminster got into some unpleasing altercation with somebody, and it ended with his having his head broken. But I am happy to say, and the House will bear witness, that with regard to its power, that head is probably as strong now as before he took his leave of Kidderminster and went to Calne—a village in the West of England. . . . When the right honorable member went down there he found a tumult even more aggravated than at Kidderminster. They did not break his head, but they did something that in the eye of the law was even worse, for they shut up the police in the Town Hall, and the little mob of this little place had the whole game to themselves. The right honorable gentleman told us of the polypus, which takes its color from the rock on which it lives; and he said that some honorable members take their colors from their constituencies. The constituency which the right honorable gentleman represents consists of 174 men, seven of whom are working men; but the real constituent of the right honorable gentleman is a member of the other House of Parliament, and he could send us his butler or his groom, instead of the right honorable gentleman, to represent the borough. I think in one sense—regarding the right honorable gentleman as an intellectual gladiator in this House—we are much indebted to the Marquis of Lansdowne that he did not do that" ('Reform,' vi, p. 350).

Somehow, we do not seem to have such sword-play now-a-days; and it is not that the later sword-play has become more delicate. Rather we must admit that an unmatched champion is gone.

## ZOLA.

A PAPER READ TO THE LIBERAL SOCIAL UNION,  
OCTOBER, 1893.

THE future French biographer of M. Zola will probably lay much stress on the fact that the reception accorded to the novelist in 1893 by the English Institute of Journalists occurred just after the publication of an expurgated English translation of the last volume ('Dr. Pascal') of the great series of novels—not because it is the last volume, but because it proclaims the moral lesson of the series. For it is one of the prevailing convictions of Frenchmen that a moral lesson is the end and aim of all forms of literature and art that flourish among the English; and if ever there was an artistic phenomenon for which, and in which, the British conscience, Nonconformist and other, was at a loss to find a popular moral pretext, it is the prose epic of the Rougon-Macquart. And, we may confess, it is difficult to believe that the Institute of Journalists, that truly British anomaly, could have got so much backing as it did for its invitation to M. Zola if it had not the expurgated version of *Le Docteur Pascal* behind it, explaining the scheme of all the novels in the series, and claiming that a great moral purpose animated the whole. There is no denying that a difficulty was set up by the plot of the story,

as apart from its synoptic motive : but then Mr. Vizetelly had skilfully gravelled the Nonconformist conscience in his preface by protesting that it was as wrong for cousins to marry in England as for uncles and nieces to marry on the Continent ; and recent events in high life had left the ethics of marriage and consanguinity in a somewhat dubious condition. But perhaps we consider too curiously when we try to find intellectual reasons for the success of any "boom" got up by the Institute of Journalists, which on the one hand has no intelligible justification for its own existence, and on the other hand is so intimately connected with the boom business in general. Journalists, barring reporters, are supposed to be mainly employed, in England, in maintaining two or more rival sets of political opinions ; and it would seem about as reasonable to set up an Institute of Critics, or Lecturers, or Members of Parliament, as one of Journalists. If the leader-writers of the *Star* and the *Standard* can fraternise, however, there seems to be no unchangeable incompatibility between M. Zola and the Britannic conscience, whether in its female form as Mrs. Grundy or in its male form as the *Times*.

Howsoever these things be, it is certain that Journalism in its broadest aspect could not more worthily have chosen a representative in the higher walks of literature than it has done in acclaiming M. Zola. The maxim which in his latest book he

puts forward as the justification of all his work is the ideal motto for journalism, which at present is about as badly in need of an ideal as any profession ever was. "To show all, so that all may be cured"—that is the maxim of Zola. "To tell all things that will tend to make all people buy, so that further all may advertise," is the most general principle of journalism, and it would be too much to hope that its official recognition of the great novelist means anything like a general feeling of respect among English journalists for his aims or even a general appreciation of his genius. The most we can assume is that the more intelligent and catholic journalists recognise his powers and feel the essential wholesomeness of all genius, while most of the rest acquiesce in his status, on the principle that nothing succeeds like success.

And this really holds good of France nearly as much as of England. Some of our journalists, with their inexpensive candor, have been avowing that we have been late in appreciating M. Zola, and they claim, with their still more inexpensive optimism, that we make amends by our cordiality when once we begin. But in point of fact Zola is even now no more a universal favorite in France than he is in England ; and he conquered his world no more rapidly there than here. Not only has he repeatedly failed in his attempt—an attempt which one would rather he had not made—to get into the Academy, but he has been and is vehemently opposed by great numbers of influen-

tial literary men and thousands of readers. The late Edmond Scherer disparaged him energetically ; Taine repudiated him as an æsthetic disciple ; Renan held his nose at him ; even M. Jules Lemaître criticises him at times somewhat in the spirit in which the respectable person in England regards him, though of course with a wide difference in expression ; and we know that the majority of the Forty will have nothing to do with him. Of course he has had weighty approval, the approval of the late Emile Hennequin among the critics and of Alphonse Daudet among the novelists, verdicts which together outweigh those of the four other writers I have mentioned. But it is important to keep in memory the fact that "French taste" is not the homogeneous thing which English prejudice represents it to be, any more than English taste is the homogeneous thing which French prejudice supposes it to be. Zola's success in France has been a process of very gradual cumulation, just as in England. The first volume of his great Rougon-Macquart series, *La Fortune des Rougon*, was published in 1871 ; and in 1884, when twelve volumes of the series had been issued, that novel was still only in its twentieth thousand, a sale very much smaller than that of almost any of the last dozen novels within a year of their appearance. What then has been the cause of the later commercial success of Zola ? I fear that the answer is the same for all Europe. His

first great popular success, the success of *L'Assommoir*, was a success of scandal, nearly half the readers reading him for the sake of his improprieties, most of the other half reading him for the same reason, but permitting themselves also the pleasure of denouncing the improprieties after perusal. Alongside of these two main bodies we may reckon the "remnant"—to use Mr. Arnold's term—who read him critically and judicially for what he was artistically worth, and the other and more respectable remnant who joined in the denunciation without reading him at all. And all alike, in their degree, helped to spread his fame and multiply his readers, till now every new book of his soon exceeds a sale of a hundred thousand, and is exported to every country on the globe. From time to time the scandal swells and storms anew, till even disciples falter in their allegiance. But each new scandal has meant a still wider sale for the scandalous book, and a wider sale also for the next book, though it might be not particularly scandalous. For many readers these facts—the scandals and the phenomena which made them—settle at once the literary status and merit of Zola. Ought they to do so? Is that a definitive or a valid criticism? My purpose now is to show briefly that it is not.

Before we pass judgment as to the most debateable features of Zola's work, let us see shortly the scope of that work as a whole—the scope of the Rougon-Macquart series of novels, that is—set-

ting the critical works aside, though they usefully illustrate the novelist's artistic attitude. As all readers know, *Les Rougon-Macquart* is the "natural and social history of a family under the Second Empire"; and its avowed plan from the start was to study French society under that empire as in a period of pervading demoralisation. "For three years," Zola wrote in the preface to the first volume, "I have been collecting the documents of this great work, and the present volume was even written when the fall of the Bonapartes, which I needed as an artist, and which I always saw inevitably at the end of the drama, without daring to hope it was so near, came to give me the terrible and necessary catastrophe of my work. That work is from now complete; it proceeds in a fixed circle; it becomes the picture of a dead reign, of a strange epoch of folly and shame." Here then is a sociological as well as an artistic purpose; and both the sociology and the art are in a manner implicated in the scheme of heredity which is put forward as uniting the whole, the ramifications of the *Rougon-Macquart* being treated as expressive of a law or laws of heredity. "I wish to set forth," says the novelist, "how a family, a little group of beings, comports itself in a society, evolving itself to give birth to ten, twenty, individuals, who seem at the first glance profoundly dissimilar, but whom analysis shows to be intimately linked the one to the other. Heredity has its laws, like weight."

And the fulfilment of the purpose has meant a long series of close studies of provincial, rural, and Parisian life ; of clerical life, as in two of the earlier stories ; of Court life and political, as in *Son Excellence Eugène Rougon* ; of poor and working-class life, as in *L'Assommoir* ; of prostitute life, as in *Nana* ; of Paris bourgeois life, as in *Pot-Bouille* ; of Stock-exchange life, as in *L'Argent* ; of peasant life, as in *La Terre* ; of army life, as in *La Débâcle* ; with endless studies of character and passion studded throughout.

Now this scheme, to begin with, is greatly conceived ; and the first query of criticism should surely be as to the general power with which it is wrought out. The question of taste falls to be raised, but only as the question of taste. Over such a scheme as Zola's the main questions to be raised are questions of power, insight and judgment. Does he seize with any broad truthfulness the society of the Second Empire? Does he see human beings as they really are, and comprehend them in their relations to each other? Is his ethical grasp of life commensurate with the range of his artistic study? Does he help us to unify our impressions? Does he widen our grasp of life? And does he all the while give us the artistic impression, making us feel that his people stand on their feet and are drawn in the round?

I cannot see how any candid reader can answer these questions save with a yes ; and if they be so answered, the main part of the critical ques-

tion is surely settled. The final, the inevitable tests of great literary work are in terms of mental energy, originality, and truth or coherence of thought. It is by these tests that we settle the place of Dante, of Shakspere, of Voltaire, of Gibbon, of Goethe. Where a man's philosophy or speculation may be false to the facts of nature, as in the case of Dante, we may still find him great in respect of his grasp, coherence, and unflagging intensity. And if he have these endowments, with a great gift of literary construction and utterance, no flaws of character, or of taste, or of art, can lose him the critical credit of greatness. Supposing Zola's faults of taste to be as unpardonable in themselves as many men pronounce them to be, they can no more cancel the facts of his imaginative and constructive energy and grasp than do the abominations of Dante's 'Inferno' cancel the fact of the intense mental and artistic energy exhibited in the details and technique as well as the scheme of the Divine Comedy. And those who cry loudest over the horrors of Zola, being often those who accept Dante with reverence, will do well to ask themselves whether the infernal horrors on which Dante so steadfastly dwells ought not to be in themselves at least as loathsome to a civilised sense as any item in all Zola.

An important criterion is the spirit in which the irksome details are handled. To what purpose are they paraded? Does Shakspere, does Dante, handle the lubricious or the ghastly in order to

tickled coarse nerves, or in fulfilment of his purpose of exhibiting life in terms of memory and ethical or theological theory? I doubt whether in either of these cases we can assent without reserve. Shakspere somewhat relished the lubricious, and Dante distinctly relished the horrible. It perhaps belonged to their time to do that without misgiving; but at the same time their age had standards which condemned lubricity, and in a less degree cruelty, though the censure of lubricity—that is, a vulgar evolution of the sensual, which in itself is healthy—and of cruelty, was always confused and perverted by an irrational theology, which pushed beyond decency into asceticism, and itself sanctioned cruelty in the fatallest way. On the whole, we cannot say Shakspere and Dante were above the vices they portrayed: at least Dante was certainly not above the vice of ferocity.

Now put the same tests to Zola. Does he picture vice and evil under the Second Empire with either relish or moral indifference? Here perhaps the answer is a little difficult. In reading such a book as *La Terre* one can hardly escape a feeling of revolt at the almost uniform odiousness of the life portrayed: one feels that the picture is overbalanced, overdone; that the evil in life does not preponderate as it does here; and that even if in a particular district of France the balance may have been lost to this extent, it is an offence against art and science alike to present the excessive case as a sample of the whole. I doubt whether we can

do better for Zola than to admit that in some or many of his books there is a sombre and disproportionate insistence on evil, just as there is in not a few of Shakspere's tragedies, and in most of Tourguénief's novels. Certain temperaments tend thus to hold the balances of life awry, whether from constitutional bias, as was probably Tourguénief's case, or from temporary experience, as was probably Shakspere's. Let us say then that Zola, either temporarily or chronically, tends overmuch to pessimism in his estimates of life, tends to dwell overmuch on the evil and to overlook the good. Is he then finally condemned, any more than Tourguénief? I think not. The fact that his pessimism is of a different sort, that he dwells on other aspects of evil than those oftenest viewed by Tourguénief, can be no valid ground for meting out to him a different critical measure. The test question is, Does he set forth evil that really exists? Does he describe it truly, so far as it goes, so far as he goes? I wish I could say I thought he did not. The vice and corruption portrayed by Zola are actual, not only in France, especially the France of last generation, but in England and other countries in varying degrees. The degradation and animalism of the peasantry, the corruption and baseness of the middle class and the rich, the instability and vice of the town workers—these are the fruits not merely of Imperialism but of commercialism—let us say of unrationnalised society under any *régime*. Granting

that Zola shows more of the dark than of the bright, what he shows is veritable.

As for his insistence on the nauseous, it seems to me to come under the same common-sense tests as we bring to bear on questions of physical sanitation which in themselves are not pleasant to dwell upon. You must contemplate if you are to cure. And I would meet all objections to the treatment of the nauseous or the vicious in fiction—all protests that certain ugly things ought not to be at all obtruded on the attention in novels—with this query: Do you yourself propose to do anything to get rid of these ugly things in so far as they are conceivably removable? When you object to Zola's exposure of the life of the peasantry, can you claim that you are taking steps on your own account to elevate and civilise that life? If you say Yes—which I hardly expect—I would suggest that Zola is helping you. If you say No, I answer that you have no case against Zola! If you say that the abominable is always to exist, only under cover, you are no saner, no more worth listening to, than the man who says that all you have to do with sewage is to put it in the back-yard, or that all you have to do with disease is to keep it as secret as possible. Beside that attitude, the attitude of Zola is one of wisdom and science: beside the gospel of keeping things dark, the gospel of *showing all that all may be cured* is noble and worthy.

It is possible of course to argue that, granting

the necessity of curing social evils, a novel is not the place in which to expose them. We are here met by certain inartistic as well as unscientific theories of the sphere of art. In every generation, masses of people are bent on making out that art and politics alike consist in doing things in the way they used to be done ; and as every great success is so by being a great innovation, the greatest performers have always been accused of breaking the rules of art. Often they are accused rightly. Some of us are satisfied that Shakspere could blunder, and Wordsworth and Wagner wander far from fitness. It belongs to innovation to be at times exorbitant. But the fact remains that art is finally indefinable, or rather illimitable : it is for ever extending itself. Many people who see very well that art is long, are very slow to realise that it is also broad : they repeat that "Art is long, life is brief," but they are always insisting on making art narrower than life. Now, Zola really quashes the protest that art ought not to do certain things, by doing them. Scott made a virtual innovation in the novel by going back two or more generations, as the drama had repeatedly done. Balzac and Thackeray made a new success by returning to contemporary society and handling that with more or less of breadth and comprehensiveness. If Scott escaped protest on the score of his novelty of scope, Balzac and Thackeray certainly did not. The people nourished on Scott, who thought romance and poetry consisted in dealing

with bygone society and times of political turmoil, found Balzac and Thackeray cynical and commonplace, and their treatment of current history dull. If these innovated, still more so did Zola. He determined to portray the life of a generation with more than the thoroughness of Balzac, to say nothing of Thackeray. He is the last great illustration of the sociological fact that in France men tend to put into the various forms of constructive art the energy and comprehensiveness of view, or the specialism of research and experiment, which in other countries we seldom see exhibited save in science and scholarship. Zola in his scheme and execution exhibits the sobriety and the judgment, the seriousness and the industry, of a Gibbon or a Ranke in history, or a Darwin or Helmholtz in science. Beside the impassiveness and impersonalness of workers like Balzac, Flaubert, Zola, Daudet, and Maupassant, our latter-day novelists figure as lacking in balance and weight, as capricious, egotistic, wayward. In point of mere industry, the power to toil terribly, none of them can compare with Zola.

But he has more than industry ; he has the reach and scope of a great constructive and imaginative intelligence ; and his plan is as great in point of quality as of quantity. He is broader and more sociological than Maupassant ; he is deeper and saner than Daudet. He has compassed a new species of human epic. Always, in estimating Zola, one's mind goes back to the earlier achieve-

ment of Balzac, who planned and wrought a series of studies of French life, Parisian and provincial, to which he gave the title of 'The Human Comedy'. It is an immense performance, representing an amount of cerebral energy and toil unsurpassed in any work in any department of literature or art ; and no recognition of either the weaknesses in the character or the flaws in the art of Balzac can hinder his ranking as a great writer. To set Zola above him out of hand would be an ill-judged compliment to the living man. But it is perfectly permissible to say that in some great essentials Zola's scheme and achievement have the advantage over those of his predecessor. Be Zola's physiological science deep or not, it is of sounder quality than the random physiological mysticism of Balzac ; and he not only works on a solider foundation as a literary pathologist, but has had the fortune to give an organic unity to his work by his resort to the principle of heredity. Balzac's great body of work is in comparison straggling and uncertain, like the researches of early science ; and his want of an organic scheme affected his art in detail, so that his artistic genius did not save him from great errors of proportion, great errors of judgment. Zola, rising to, or rather towards, a great scientific art scheme, has become a great though never a faultless artist.

The point above all to be noted in this connection is that both men have felt the necessity of connecting their psychology with physiology. They

have more or less clearly recognised that minds, temperaments, are functions of bodies ; and Zola, belonging to the more scientific generation, has sought to bottom his survey of an age on a great biological principle. It cannot be said that he has made either the scientific or the artistic side of his performance perfect. On the one hand, there really does not yet exist any such definite science of heredity as his language at the outset implied ; and on the other hand the requirements of art, of the sense of symmetry and satisfying order, are always tending to force the pathology somewhat. I speak as one of the crowd, but I cannot feel there is any reasonable probability in making Aunt Dide, the mother of the first Rougon and Macquarts of the story, such a central figure either in heredity or in time. What about the ancestors and ancestresses of all the men and women with whom the Rougons and Macquarts married ? And what is to be said for the likelihood of the survival of this stricken woman to the enormous age of 105 ? To begin with, she herself was the daughter of a man who had died mad. Then, ill-nourished and epileptic, after her stormy and ill-starred conjugal life is over, she is the prey of monthly convulsive fits, which shake her almost into inanition. How are we to believe that such an organism in bad conditions can survive to 83, only then to fall into helpless insanity, and then to live for twenty-two years more ? It seems clear that the instinct for symmetry, the plan of the series, is answerable for

such a monstrous strain on our sense of probability. Similarly, Dr. Pascal's ignorance of his own heart-disease till it is at the last stage is one of several improbabilities in the last novel which can be set down only to the necessities of the plot ; just as in the first volume the thirty years of unsuccess of Pierre Rougon, after a successfully unscrupulous start, is an incongruity apparently forced by the plan, which was to make the family's fortune date from the Bonapartist *Coup d'Etat*. In the first novel we are struck also by the piecemeal back-and-forward character of the narrative, suggesting a difficulty on the novelist's part in evolving his personages—a difficulty which seems to connect with his double bias as an artist, the bias on the one hand to the presentation of typical characters acting typically, without progression, and on the other hand to the study of tendencies in mass.

But when all deductions have been made, the element of heredity in Zola's scheme is valuable and valid, not only as giving a continuity to his series but as deepening the total conception of life conveyed. His performance is so much the greater inasmuch as it touches on the fundamental problems and conclusions of life. Where an artist can introduce into his work ideas and meanings which outgo its primary or normal object, provided only he does not frustrate or override the artistic function, he is a greater and not a less artist on that account. And Zola, though he has artistic

faults, is always fundamentally an artist, and the faults are an artist's faults. Art so-called, of which the aim is illusion, must always run greater risks of falsity than science, so-called, which aims expressly at truth, though the ideal rectitude is rarely attained in science itself. The needful thing is that the artist should have in him so much veracity of observation and so much connectedness of mind as would go to securing truth if applied to an explicitly scientific end. Art is lost when in the name of science the artist makes his personages mere mouthpieces of doctrines, missing portraiture while professing to give it. But Zola is always fundamentally an artist ; and even when he is explicitly advancing his doctrines through the mouth of one of his personages, as in 'Doctor Pascal', he never loses his biological hold of the character.\*

The truth is, Zola is kept artistic by that side of his temperament or intelligence which keeps him always in touch with the great physical facts of life, and which has thus brought on him denunciation as a pornographer and a sensualist. He insists on treating men and women in the main as sexual animals, fully recognising that a certain proportion have little or none of the instinct, but knowing that the instinct is the most general and fundamental of all. Inasmuch as he gives prominence to the play of this instinct, and never hesitates to trace its excesses and perversions, he is

[\*I am not prepared to say this of his latest works, such as *Fécondité*.]

specially repugnant to the many people who, in England and America, elevate prudery into a first principle of conduct, as others do teetotalism and vegetarianism. Now, all censure passed upon Zola from this point of view is a mere fanatical begging of the question. Asceticism is not morality ; Puritanism is not morality. To put the matter as emphatically as possible, we find asceticism and Puritanism among people who have no scruples about lying and swindling, which are more essentially immoral acts than many forms of sexual laxity, so called. In Mr. Stevenson's story 'The Wreckers' we have a most instructive contrast between French and American or Puritan morality. A young American is sincerely revolted at the libertinism of young Frenchmen, and, himself a Puritan in this respect, goes home to the States and enters into a series of unscrupulous commercial enterprises, which include the buying of rotten ships and manning and sending them to sea heavily insured. He is in other respects generous and loyal. Is he a better or a worse man than the French man about town, who can also be generous and loyal in certain respects? It is clear that the ethical question must be settled, if at all, from a point of view extraneous to the mere prejudices and habits of both races. The restriction of the word morality to the significance of mere Puritanism in one of the relations of life, marks the great disservice done by Puritanism to our civilisation.

As for Zola's pitiless and callous handling of the vices of sex, it seems to me to come under the principle applicable to his treatment of social evil in general. He sets out to represent life: he is one of the most thorough illustrators of the principle of true fiction—the criticism of life by the representation of it. He shows all, as he tells us, in order to cure all; and long before he avowed that as his aim—perhaps before he fully rose to that aim; for he is much less hopeful in his earlier than in his later work—many of his readers must have felt that showing all was the way to cure all, if any way there be. Over four years ago, when the publisher of the English translations of some of Zola's novels was being prosecuted by the foolish fanatics who think a healthy "purity" is to be secured by hindering people from reading in their own language things they are free to read in another if they can, I took occasion to claim for Zola, while charging against him a certain morbid bias in his selection of facts, that his work essentially made for reformation and regeneration. "If the human race," I said in conclusion, "is ever to get on a healthy footing as regards the appetites and instincts by which it subsists, it will clearly have to be by the way of science, knowledge, and self-respect; not by that of convention, ignorance, and imbecile dissimulation. To pagan corruption there has succeeded a Christian corruption far more baffling, because always dissembled and disavowed. If we are to cure the disease we must

face all the facts ; and it is this that Zola helps us to do." And to this I would now add that the completion of Zola's great task fully vindicates that view. Zola's work has tended to purify and elevate and encourage France and mankind as it has apparently served to lead himself to new hope for mankind. There has grown upon him a recognition and conviction of a principle of betterment incessantly at work amid the evil, seeming as it were to be only the other side of the evil. The novelist's tone is raised : laying down his armor, he is more elate than when he put it on. The Doctor Pascal of the last novel is a more human, a more vital, a more lovable being than the Doctor Pascal of the first ; and the upshot of the long survey of the primarily tainted family stock is far more reassuring than were the first steps of it. We come back to a sense of the inexhaustibleness of the sane and healthy elements in humanity, of the principle of life. In the penultimate work, the great study of *La Debâcle*, with its incomparable seizure and picture of the crowning catastrophe of Sedan and the long agony of Paris, we come to this standing ground as regards the case of the nation of France. We felt the indestructibleness of the French genius and capacity and race, even at the moment of France's deepest humiliation and defeat ; and we felt that there could be no finer proof of her vitality than the French novelist's lucid and nobly dispassionate record of the causes of the overthrow of Empire and army at once. So,

in the last volume of all, are we made to feel that for humanity at large, as for the flawed family-stock, there is an evolving force in the good and a self-dissolving force in the evil ; and again the most convincing element in the proof is the knowledge that we have seen the worst deliberately unveiled.

If this be broadly true, Zola is abundantly justified. To have done all this is to have done great things ; and without going at any further length into questions of detail as to his method and his mistakes—without attempting to estimate the value of his vigorous criticisms of contemporary drama and literature, which are really worthy of close study and high praise, I will close by venturing confidently to predict that Zola must finally rank as one of the great imaginative writers of modern Europe, and that if he lives fifteen or perhaps even ten years longer he will be elected to the French Academy, if he should not come to see that it is hardly worth his while. He has already triumphed over an opposition far more massive than an Academy can ever represent, the resistance of the prejudices of whole nations and of half a generation of his own. He seemed at times to be working his own overthrow by horrifying his own disciples. But the disciples go out of sight, and the Master goes on. In the long run, nothing can resist persistent elemental power—nothing, not even journalism.

## THACKERAY.

(1891.)

"THE two key-secrets of Thackeray's great life, as I take it," says the late Mr. Herman Merivale in one of the chapters he wrote for the 'Life of Thackeray' now published in the Great Writers Series, "were these—Disappointment, and Religion. The first was his poison ; the second was his antidote. *And, as always, the antidote won.*" The last sentence, italicised by me, suffices to let us see the kind of thought we are dealing with. The nearest parallel to it in literature is the statement of Mr. Wilkie Collins that "the lasting preservation of a secret is a miracle which the world has not yet seen". One asks, what is the value of any statement as to Religion by a gentleman who commits the proposition that "as always, the antidote won" ; as who should say, "as always, the victor triumphed".

Thackeray has suffered for his aversion to a formal biography : no performance of that kind could be more unsatisfactory than the books which have been written about him, apart from the Brookfield letters. Mr. Herman Merivale was doubtless an estimable gentleman, but he seems to have been a pronounced sentimentalist ; and the chapters written by him are supplemented by Mr. Frank T. Marzials, who may or may not be personally sentimental, with only too much fidelity

to the key set by Mr. Merivale. It is the latter, however, who does most to make the reader speculate as to how Mr. Yellowplush would have treated these memoirs, could he return for an evening to the knifeboard. Conceive how he would have dealt with "the antidote, as always, won," had he met it in the blank verse of 'The Sea Captain'!

Still, this absurd deliverance of Mr. Merivale's seems to have caught the fancy of many critics, technically so-called, and readers. It hits the orthodox intelligence. I find it to have meant nothing, even for Mr. Merivale; for he tells us later that "the man was a new Ecclesiast, and sad beyond belief accordingly"—this immediately after repeating his formula about the bane and the antidote. And later on Mr. Marzials quotes for us the letter in which Thackeray said: "I don't pity anybody who leaves the world, not even a fair young girl in her prime; I pity those remaining. . . . Would you care about going on the voyage, only for the dear souls left on the other shore?" What does this mean but that Thackeray's religion was no "antidote" at all to his life-sadness: that it left him contemplating death as a release, as any weary Pagan might have done? He suggests that, "brought nearer the Divine light and warmth, there must be a serene climate"; but he adds "Can't you fancy sailing into the calm?" How otherwise does an unbeliever, tired of life, welcome the peace of the grave?

And yet, how little does the discussion thus raised by the sentimentalism of Mr. Merivale help us to conceive Thackeray the man as he was, in his generosity, his vitality, his waywardness, his genius, his weakness. Assuredly religion in his case, as in that of most men, is an attitude little grounded in personality, or, say rather, an artificial light which sickles o'er the natural man, and travesties him by supplying a portrait from one half-hysterical mood. To mention that he had heart disease explains more than all these quotations. Even yet, one can hardly feel that one knows him well from the scanty biographical details ; but those now collected at least give us new lights by being put together. Old perplexities are solved in the simple fashion of real life : we find that Thackeray had a variable nature, like so many another.

“A big, fierce, hungry, weeping man,” was Carlyle’s characteristically ungenial account of him, which will help you to some notion of him when you remember that a description of Carlyle himself in the same spirit would run : “A tall, bilious, splenetic, eloquent, cursing man.” The “hungry” points to Thackeray’s physical joy in life, his love of good cheer, his frank love of praise ; the “fierce” and “weeping” are both true in their way. His tenderness was the foil to a cynicism or asperity which made him at times unjust, often severe ; and both sides of him were equally genuine, though latterly the kind side was

far the oftener in evidence. Some people persist in calling him a cynic ; others warmly protest that he was the softest-hearted of men. Neither side will see that he was both by turns.

And that brings me once more to the question of Thackeray's religious notions, and the contrast they make with his treatment of other people's religious notions. I think I can trust to a fifteen years' recollection of the contempt with which he treated the religious exaltations of George Sand's *Spiridion*, and the satire he had ready for all forms of French extravagance, as he saw them with his British eyes in his young days. And I have before me in the present 'Life' the amazing passage in which Dr. John Brown (here quoted simply as a writer in the *North British Review*, though Mr. Merivale elsewhere alludes to him as the author) has told how the mature Thackeray, walking one day to the west of Edinburgh, saw a wooden crane stand out from the quarry on Corstorphine Hill, and "gave utterance, in a tremulous, gentle, and rapid voice, to what all were feeling, in the word 'Calvary ! ' ". I ask myself now, as I asked myself when I first read the passage : " Could anything go further in the way of grotesque 'French sentiment', as Englishmen commonly view it ; and would anyone have said so more contemptuously than Thackeray would, had he seen such a passage in George Sand in his young days ? "

But this is not the mood in which I like to think of the incomparable novelist, whose work I esteem

to a degree that makes me breathe threatenings and slaughters when I find Mr. Merivale, a professed admirer, saying "I have never been able to look on character as Thackeray's strongest point". Well, I reflect that it was Mr. Merivale who wrote: "as always, the antidote won". Only it is necessary to point out, in this matter of Thackeray's avowed orthodoxy, that on such questions his opinion had no value. He was no thinker; no logician: the literary logic of Mr. Yellowplush was simply the artist's instinct of style. Mr. Marzials writes: "There is no evidence in his works of any passionate struggle between belief and disbelief. None of his characters go through that fiery trial. He never seems to have anticipated in any way the religious problems that perplex this generation, and are debated in magazines, reviews, newspapers, novels. God's providence, Christ's mission to mankind, man's future life—all these he habitually takes for granted." Do I dream; or am I right in my distinct recollection that Pendennis—whom Mr. Marzials goes on to mention, and who is partly a presentment of his creator's own experience—does have a period of intellectual doubt? Surely this is so; but it is further true that Thackeray makes a very poor job of the exposition, simply because his own faculty did not enable him to realise properly the rationalist position. His genius was wholly artistic, that of the observer, never that of the reasoner, save when he is ex-

pressing his keen sense of the inconsistency of men's lives.

In this connection Mr. Marzials makes an interesting comment. In a recent novel, he points out, the language of prayerful faith is spoken of as having an odd and quaint effect when used in personal intercourse, while "forty years ago it was held natural for Arthur Pendennis to kneel down in prayer". Mr. Marzials himself speaks of the "ennobling effect" of the old faith "on human character", so at least some readers will be consoled, as they doubtless will be further when they learn from Mr. Marzials that Thackeray in his trip to Palestine "behaved with all reverence in the Holy Places, feeling and expressing a sense of awe. There be humorists and humorists, indeed; and this humorist, though ready enough to laugh at pretentiousness and over-blown sentiment, knew when his laughter ought to be hushed." Which simply means that for Mr. Marzials, as for the average religionist, "the test of fitness is, agreement with my creed". Well, I take leave to say that Mr. Marzials' deliverance is precisely a piece of "over-blown sentiment". Laughter, surely, is hardly the mood for any man when visiting the shrines of any religion, be it his or not; and to suggest that a typical humorist might laugh over them is to strive hard for a literary effect. Mr. Marzials, surely, would scarcely plume himself on having shown a decent gravity over the Holy Places of Buddhism or Mohammedanism. But

would it ever occur to him to be reverent over the places once sacred to Osiris in Egypt?

Thackeray, as it happens, had in virtue of his artistic impressibility a wider outlook in these matters than his biographers. At one time he was inclined to Catholicism. "But at another time we find him questioning the reality of the devotional feeling excited by beautiful music and choral singing. This was after a visit to Magdalen Chapel, Oxford. In a letter to a friend, he severely depreciates the school of Thomas à Kempis, as taking all the love and use and brightness out of life." Mr. Merivale thought that judgment "neither true nor worthy of him". But it states the secret feeling of a great many believers, who are ashamed to utter it. It needed Thackeray's courage and honesty to say such a thing. And let it be here said that among his shining virtues not the least eminent was his sincerity and outspokenness. In that he was as much superior to the society in which he lived as he was in his genius.

Sincerity, in truth, is of the essence of Thackeray's art. Deeply significant of his relation to literature is the fact that only after failing at the pinch to live by his pencil did he bethink himself of trying to live by his pen. In his opulent youth he sought to be a painter, persisting long in a pursuit for which he had no true vocation. Current fiction—the art for which he was supremely qualified—doubtless struck him as too insincere,

too false, to permit of his ever being at home in such a craft. His favorite novelist was Fielding ; and how should such a taste comport itself in the field of British fiction in the middle years of the nineteenth century? It was only the stress of sheer need that drove him to literature ; and, remembering as much, his countrymen have cause to say devoutly that it is an ill wind that blows nobody good. Even as we owe the plays of Shakspere to the commercial ill-luck of his father, we owe the novels of Thackeray to the loss or wasting of his patrimony.

Fitting it is that the two cases should be bracketed, for, profoundly as their gifts differed, there is in English literature no such genius for portraiture as Thackeray's between Shakspere's day and his. Without the great master's tragic passion, without his poetic inspiration, the showman of 'Vanity Fair' is even the truer master of the two in all that belongs to the sombre and sardonic comedy of life : so great is he there that his total work has for us the enduring vitality of depth and truth which we express by the term "Shaksperean". Faults of construction there are in his books, tics of personal expiation, weaknesses of didacticism of which the criticism of competent colleagues might have cured him had he had any ; but in the gift of seeing a character, a temperament (in distinction from a mind) as it actually lives, and of presenting it in the round, in the living light of day, he is surpassed by no

novelist in any literature. Those who have once realised his supremacy in this field can have no misgivings about his fame. It matters not to them whether Dickens has still the larger public: Thackeray's time must come even as Shakspere's came after a day which set as much store by Jonson and Fletcher as by him ; even as Jane Austen's has come after a period in which Charlotte Brontë's fine melodrama outshone the other's finer comedy. Unless civilisation is already in decadence, no local or national limitation of judgment can outlive the spell of perfect vision and perfect reproduction—that spell which brings the world's artists in utter admiration to the feet of Spanish Velasquez, and holds us for ever chained to Shakspere's throne. To the critico-sociological eye, there is nothing more perplexing in the scant tribute of contemporary English criticism to Thackeray than in Sainte-Beuve's failure to do a semblance of justice to Balzac. The critical tribute of a Zola, himself an artist, makes good to Balzac's memory the critic's lapse ; and unless the market-seeking story of sensation shall haply kill, in the commercial struggle for existence, all higher types of fiction among us, the maker of *Barry Lyndon* will be hailed as a master while novels are written in the English tongue.

## STEVENSON'S MINOR WORKS.

### I.—‘UNDERWOODS.’

(1887.)

IT has by this time come about that a new book by Mr. Stevenson is welcomed by a crowd of good readers with a measure of that confidence of reward with which one turns to a known classic, so distinct has been the stamp of genius on some part at least of every volume he has produced. He has made what promises to be a permanent mark in English literature as a writer of prose ; and now that he comes forward with a volume of verse—his first, with the exception of his ‘Child’s Garden of Verses’—there will be perhaps a special degree of curiosity among his audience. There have been many cases of failure in verse by men who in prose showed genius—for instance, Lamb and Carlyle ; indeed English literature exhibits few or no cases of the double gift to match those of Goethe and Heine, who, by the way, had the advantage of writing in a language which was virtually without standards of prose excellence, for a nation apparently still devoid of sense of style. Mr. Arnold, who has done some incomparable verse, is rather a charming and lucid stylist than a man of genius in prose. And it may be said at once that Mr. Stevenson is rather a very delightful writer of verse than a great poet, though his gift of fresh and vital expression yields at times

such results as to set one wondering what might have been if he had concentrated his powers on verse from early youth up, like Tennyson. Poetry, after all, is two-thirds technique: why should not a master of words on the plane of the higher prose acquire the graces of rhythm and cadence, and attain that emotional concentration of feeling which distinguishes poetry from simple verse? The easiest form of answer is a simple reference to the case of Lamb, whose prose is so unique, whose verse is so undistinguished, though he underwent more technical preparation for the verse than for the prose. Mr. Stevenson, however, gives us verse markedly better than any of Lamb's. He has with instinctive judgment confined himself almost wholly to short metres, success in which is so much easier to occasional performers than in longer lines, though transcendentalist readers may disdain such a mechanical theory of the art; and as a result we have a number of couplets that might make us think Andrew Marvell had come alive again—couplets not so massively perfect as Marvell's two or three best, but set in verse of a higher average felicity than his. Take this from the charming lines entitled 'The Canoe Speaks':

"By all retired and shady spots  
Where prosper dim forget-me-nots;"

this from the poem 'To K. de M.' :

"Winds that in darkness fife a tune,  
And the high-riding, virgin moon";

and this from the verses 'To Andrew Lang' :

"The plovery forest and the seas  
That break about the Hebrides."

Here — though both Wordsworth and Poe have anticipated the chime of "seas" and "Hebrides" — are three happy originalities of epithet, of the kind so common in Mr. Stevenson's prose, turned to really poetic account. But it must not be supposed that these 'Underwoods' are merely notable for occasional adroit verbal experiments : on the contrary, one does not meet in a year's reading of new verse such an amount of vivid and characteristic thought, adequately phrased, as is packed in this little book. Every page has its cargo ; and no further praise need be given than to say that most of the pieces have the kind and measure of value belonging to the author's prose essays, but distilled and melodised. No less telling than the rhymed is the blank verse, which has certain Miltonic, Tennysonian, and Arnoldian tones, but withal a distinction of its own, as the student may gather from a random sample or two :

"And thou hast heard of yore the Blatant Beast,  
And Roland's horn, and that war-scattering shout  
Of all-unarmed Achilles, ægis-crowned."

"Alas ! in evil days, thy steps return,  
To list at noon for nightingales, to grow  
A dweller on the beach till Argo come  
That came long since, a lingerer by the pool  
Where that desired angel bathes no more."

Yet these scrappy samples are not really representative, and it is but scanty justice to the book

to cite two of the shortest pieces in their entirety. One is a memorable bit of self-criticism :

"Sing clearlier, Muse, or evermore be still,  
Sing truer or no longer sing!  
No more the voice of melancholy Jacques,  
To wake a weeping echo in the hill;  
But as the boy, the pirate of the spring,  
From the green elm a living linnet takes,  
One natural verse recapture—then be still."

The following little 'Requiem' is not the only or even the artistically best response to the poet's behest of himself ; but it is a true lyric expression of a personal note which sounds many times in the book—in the very characteristic lines headed 'The Celestial Surgeon', in the fine verses 'To H. F. Brown', and in the strangely, smilingly pathetic prose 'Dedication' to the physicians from whom the author has had help in his chequered pilgrimage :

"Under the wide and starry sky,  
Dig the grave and let me lie.  
Glad did I live and gladly die,  
And I laid me down with a will.  
This be the verse you grave for me:  
*Here he lies where he longed to be;*  
*Home is the sailor, home from sea,*  
*And the hunter home from the hill.*"

But I am using up space in notice of the English poems, which constitute only half of 'Underwoods' ; and it would be unpardonable to omit praise of 'Book II.—*In Scots*', to which the Scotch reader will perhaps be disposed to turn first after reading the capturing prose 'Note' of preface. If so, he will be well repaid. I do not

## II.—THE TALES.

(1889.)

It is one of the critical sayings of Mr. Swinburne that "where genius takes one false step in the twilight and draws back by instinct, intelligence once misguided will take a thousand without the slightest diffidence"; the proposition being duly elaborated in one of the poet's most distressing exhibitions of debauched prose. For disputing this dictum there are many reasons, not the least of which is that if it were to be taken as axiomatic we should have to deny genius to Mr. Swinburne himself, not to speak of such poets as Wordsworth and Shelley. It would really be nearer the truth to say that where confident and infatuated genius will follow a will-o'-the-wisp through acres of quagmire, circumspect intelligence, shunning great risks, will wisely recoil and follow the path of judgment. But this generalisation would be unprofitable, for the simple reason that there is no such generic distinction between genius and "intelligence" as Mr. Swinburne supposes. Apply either formula to a handful of cases, and it merely confounds confusion. The one truth involved is that a superior faculty may blunder as completely as a mediocre one, and this truth it is that, without any *à priori* argument, forces itself upon the sympathetic reader of Mr. Stevenson's shorter tales.

Writing without having seen his 'Black

Arrow', which does not seem to have exactly hit the mark with the public, one is strongly disposed, on a mere perusal of the volume of 'The Merry Men and other Tales and Fables', to apprehend for Mr. Stevenson serious misadventures in his career as a writer of fiction. About his talent—his genius, if Mr. Swinburne will—there is no question; it is agreed that not for a generation has a prose writer appeared who seems more likely to become in his way a classic. But that genius can blunder, nobody knows better than Mr. Stevenson. He has as a matter of course excluded from his volume of tales a short story which those who remember to have read it eight or ten years ago, in the defunct *New Quarterly Magazine*, will agree to rank among the worst performances they ever read on the strength of a welcome signature. While, however, there is nothing nearly so bad in the collection published last year, there is quite enough in it to raise grave critical question. 'Prince Otto,' 'Treasure Island,' 'Kidnapped,' and the 'New Arabian Nights,' are in their way all masterpieces; and the "way" of the first and the last is original and remarkable. Of the 'Merry Men' volume, on the other hand, it is hardly possible to say that any one item is a complete success.

To take first the least satisfactory sample, 'Will o' the Mill', which is neither a tale proper nor a fable proper or improper, it would be difficult to point to any fairly well written story in contem-

porary literature which so completely baulks alike the ethical and the dramatic sense. The central character is a version of the same conception as meets us in the boy in 'Treasure of Franchard', a tranquil and self-possessed organism, prematurely wise; and in the earlier pages one is prepared for a significant development of the idea. At one stage this seems to be in full course, as when the fat young man persuades Will that the world of the plain is only his own little world with a difference, and that it is worth no man's while to travel. And, though the story loiters, we seem to be having a logical fulfilment of the idea in the episode of Marjory, whom Will loses for sheer lack of ardor. But from that point logical or emotional evolution is at an end: the meandering stream is simply lost in a marsh. We are told that Will grew famous for his wisdom, of which we have no specimens, and finally he dies, very pretentiously, so to speak, but to no artistic or logical purpose. The story has no unity: we are left asking what it is all about. Now, if unity of idea may perhaps be successfully dispensed with at times in a realistic study (and even this is doubtful, looking to the practice of the great realists, such as Tourguénief and Flaubert), it certainly cannot be dispensed with in a work that, like 'Will o' the Mill', purposely idealises and abstracts the actual. A work of fancy must be fancifully congruous, and its didactic drift must be certain, if we are not to be left fretting against

frustration. But 'Will o' the Mill' reads as if Mr. Stevenson had begun it with the purpose of applying the moral of Mr. Browning's 'Youth and Art'—that courage and the taking of risks is better than passionless wisdom; had after a time hesitated to stand to his doctrine; and had finally admitted to Himself that passionless wisdom may, after all, be as good a line as the other, insinuating only a hint of its tragic deprivations. This veering of opinion is very good matter for an essay or a dialogue, but clearly not for a story. The artist who leaves on his canvas the plain marks of a change in his intention has left us not a picture but an autobiographical document, only technically interesting to the critic. And even if this be not a true account of the making of 'Will o' the Mill', the story is condemned by the fact that it leaves us thus at a loss. In real life matters often seem chaotic; and purposely to present the chaos is legitimate art enough; but Mr. Stevenson does not present real life at all. The story is a fiction miscarried.

Even against the most important story in the book, the charge of lack of unity is partly relevant. 'The Merry Men' is the narrative, in the first person, of a young Scot of last century, who is concerned in the events he describes. But this young Scot of last century has in his story-telling Mr. Stevenson's modern sense of the moral and literary picturesque, though that is in no way congruous with his self-presentation; and we thus have the

hard-headed youth writing with only a faint and factitious flavor of last century style, reproducing dialogue with none of the last century method ; and telling a story with the modern eye to side lights. The same might be said, of course, of David Balfour in 'Kidnapped' ; and it may be noted that the hero here is David Balfour over again as Will is Jean-Marie over again ; but 'Kidnapped' was practically unified by the completion of the story of David Balfour's fortunes, whereas 'The Merry Men' ends with the central episode. Doubtless it was in a way prudent so to end it, since the story-teller and his sweetheart, especially the latter, are not very tangible ; but the disunity remains. This may seem a carping view to take of a striking and original story ; but the purpose of the carping is to insist on Mr. Stevenson's need for putting more thought into the plan of a story, as distinguished from the execution. Idealism without plan, as in 'Will o' the Mill', is nihilism ; and minor defect of plan tells in degree in the stronger work.

Minor defect of plan there seems to be, again, in 'The Treasure of Franchard', when, at the close, the whole business of the fall of the house, the visit to the tarpaulin-covered ruins, and the talk of setting to work upon them, serves no evolutional purpose ; and the missing treasure, which we had all begun to expect to see recovered from the rubbish, is brought by Jean-Marie from a distant cave. But this flaw

is overshadowed by the more serious artistic inferiority of the whole story ; which finally impresses one as a bad mixture of Charles Reade and Mr. George Meredith. The Reade manner, the manner of knowing nod and wink and authorial obtrusion, is a manner that wears ill, and can never be classic ; and Mr. Stevenson can so perfectly do without it that it is the falsest economy on his part to use it. What of philosophy there is in the story suffers from the cheapness of the manner ; and it is, besides, of the essence of that manner to drag a writer's philosophy down to itself. Reade rapidly lost the value of what subtlety he had by the wink with which he accompanied it ; the experienced reader coming to feel that winking is the least subtle of artistic devices.

The end of the whole matter is, however, that Mr. Stevenson needs to solidify his thinking if he is to make prosperous progress in the writing of fiction. The quantity of mind to the square inch of work—this is the inevitable ultimate test of all art ; and whereas it is satisfied in the case of Mr. Stevenson's higher performances, either by labor of reflection or by labor of imagination and expression, it is not at all satisfied in such stories as 'Olalla' and 'The Treasure of Franchard', not to speak of 'Will o' the Mill'. 'Olalla' has at best a factitious motive, which stultifies itself in the very exposition ; for if the decaying Spanish family be as hopeless a breed as the story says, an Olalla is an impossibility in it ; and even if she

were not, a young woman who reasons so incisively as this one does on the subject of heredity would hardly altogether miss sight of the chance that a new cross with such a superior specimen as herself would do very well. As it is, Olalla, and consequently 'Olalla', heroine and story, will *not* do. In any case, it is not original, the heredity motive having been used in a recent novel, and the wild-beast-woman motive in 'Jane Eyre'.

Reading 'The Merry Men' and 'Thrawn Janet', one cannot but wish that Mr. Stevenson would bring his powers to bear on some less sensational treatment of Scotch life and character than he has yet attempted. 'Thrawn Janet' is a remarkable *tour de force*, which would, however, have been much more effective if it had been, so to speak, humanly "set", instead of hanging like a vision on the void; and the very skill of the dialect in 'The Merry Men', as in the incomparable paragraph on land deils and sea deils, rather disturbs than adds to the total effect of the story, because it strikes a different artistic key from the sensational. Taken from its context, that paragraph would read like a bit from a Scotch 'Jumping Frog'. To Mr. Stevenson's Scotch one objects only that his habit of substituting "of" for "o'" before a vowel is not justified either by actual practice or by classic authority; and that he also errs in giving the full "ing" ending to participles. In no district, surely, would Scotch people speak of "blawing whales". This might

be mended. It is probably idle, however, to hope that Mr. Stevenson will alter his method and turn realist ; and it must be doubly idle to suggest it to him. We can but be thankful for what he has given us in his own walk, and trust that, in order to progress in that, he will discipline himself as it has been above contended he ought to do.

## BELLES LETTRES IN SCOTLAND

(1888.)

WHEN it is remarked, as it has been recently, that Mr. Robert Louis Stevenson ranks at the head of *Belles Lettres* in Scotland, the assent instantly given is just as promptly followed by a musing question as to what it is that Mr. Stevenson is at the head of. Those who put the proposition admit that there is nothing specially representative of Scotland in Mr. Stevenson's tone and style ; but our inquiry need not be complicated by any such æsthetic issue. When we can decide whether the truly representative Scotch manner and point of view are those of Burns, of Hume, of Scott, of Wilson, of Carlyle, of Hugh Miller, or of John Brown, it may be possible to gauge accurately the Scotchness of Mr. Stevenson ; in the meantime it can but be said that if his is a new note, so were the notes of these others in their day, and so must always be the note of the original writer. Scotch literature must just be, for our present purpose, the literature written by Scotchmen with a direct or indirect bearing on Scottish life. This of course excludes, as is desirable, any idea of parochial rivalry between Scotchmen and Englishmen in matters of unlocalised art or thought ; there being no question as to how the two kingdoms com-

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pare in the literature of the sciences or of philosophy ; nor even any comparison on the side of pure poetry. By Scottish *Belles Lettres* one naturally means those works of imagination inspired by things Scotch ; and perhaps, in addition, Scottish history.

How then do we stand? Mr. Stevenson has contributed to Scotch letters by way of vernacular verse, prose fiction, and historic and other criticism. On the first head he is *facile princeps*, by virtue of the universal ineptitude of our home-staying lyric patriots, whose common distinction is treason to the very idiom they gratuitously elect to employ, whether because of sheer ignorance or of dulness of sense let us not linger to ask. Vernacular apart, however, Mr. Stevenson is less of a Scottish poet than Mr. Robert Buchanan, whose 'Idylls and Legends of Inverburn', if not the sort of book that one confidently counts on re-reading, figures in one's memory as a creditable attempt in a given *genre*; so that, his output of Scottish criticism and strictly Scottish essay being inconsiderable, the *novus homo* takes his asserted rank mainly on the score of his fiction. Now, if his rank be really allowed, this fact is a remarkable reflection on the other fictional literature of the country. We have three novelists of popular standing, Mrs. Oliphant, Mr. George MacDonald, and Mr. William Black—all of whom, while dealing with life other than Scotch, yet have repeatedly handled that : the two last having indeed mainly won their

reputation in this direction. If then Mr. Stevenson be the most notable fictionist of the four, whether as regards Scotch or as regards English characterisation, it would seem to follow that the others, with their much larger product, are of little account as makers of native literature, however popular as public entertainers. And this is really the opinion one is led to after a critical comparison of the authors in question. Nobody can deny them ability and industry ; and yet no roomful of Scotchmen is ever found to pronounce favorably on their presentment of Scotch life and character. Between treatment and choice of theme they have contrived to avoid any convincing reproduction of the life of their time, and to live for us in Scotland as agreeable or suggestive romancers, who happened to lay the scene of their romances more or less in Scotland, and to give their characters Scotch names. To realise how entirely destitute we are of real contemporary Scotch fiction, we have but to contrast the treatment of American life by Mr. Howells and Mr. James with the Scotch work of our Scotch novelists. In the American cases we feel we are at least partially introduced to a living society. Americans may indeed dispute over the representation ; and Bostonians may repudiate Mr. Howells' accounts of them ; but anyone can see that Mr. Howells, up to his limits, has his eye on something ; and if Bostonians knew when they were well off they would be grateful for the element of culture involved in

the possession of a school of fiction which makes their normal life an art subject. A composition of normal Boston experiences has become a matter that can interest, more or less, an instructed reader in any civilised country. Can anything similar be said of the fiction of contemporary Scotland?

It is with a curious sensation that we thus realise our exclusion from part of the world's literary heritage. People living in any of the important towns of continental Europe are accustomed, like those of London and New York and Boston, to see their society treated with some measure of confidence and competence of portraiture in novel after novel: we in Glasgow and Edinburgh have to turn back to Scott to get a similar sensation. Some sections of our community, indeed, can have it after a fashion; they get it in stories in which an impersonal detective of Ulyssean craft and experience tracks conventional criminals through streets of known name and runs them to earth in closes of supposed actuality. Those of us whose palates are too nice for that fare must just get along without the desired nutriment. We have a society full of characters and experiences, ups and downs, comedy and tragedy, as well as Boston; but there lacks for us the *vates sacer*, and our whole human polity will die unremembered, or dimly inferred from the faint cartoons of our idealistic novelists. If we turn from fiction to drama, the case becomes overwhelming. We no longer attempt to represent

Scotch life on the stage at all. 'Rob Roy,' the 'Lady of the Lake,' and 'Jeanie Deans,' those compositions out of compositions, conventionalised at the second remove from imagination, keep our boards with a perdurable hold: they have come to stay; but of any attempt to "make" afresh from the native life of to-day there is not even a whisper. Mr. Stevenson, indeed, did once perpetrate, in complicity with Mr. Henley, a melodrama on the history of a murderous deacon dear to tradition; of which the withdrawal is to be explained only on a hypothesis of conscientious motives, since it cannot conceivably have been too bad, as melodramas go. But beyond this, one remembers nothing worth an allusion. We get our plays, such as they are, from London; and the battered metropolitan play-manufacturer, despicable to the eye of the literate playgoer, becomes in contrast with our provincial paralysis an energetic and imaginative figure, looking at life for himself and in a manner concerned with the representation of it. We cannot even make our own rubbish. And for a number of years one of the most popular representatives of Jeanie Deans in the minor theatres has been a lady who does not even pretend to speak Scotch.

To say that this state of things means degeneration is not provincialism, but the reverse of provincialism. It is provincial, if you like, to let use and wont override reason in law, or to "think the rustic cackle of your bourg the murmur of the

world." It would be provincial to prefer your own man of science, or imaginative painter, or musical composer, on parochial grounds, to the great scientists, painters, and composers of the period. But it is not provincial to desire that the life of your province should form subject-matter for fictional and dramatic art, any more than it is provincial to want a painting of your own landscape. Rather this is to seek that the life of the province shall acquire cosmopolitan value; the real provincialism consisting in a contented fall below cosmopolitan standards, whether the content come from an over-estimate of the existing environment or a blindness to its *lacuna*. The Scotchman who is unalterably complacent over the music of his country is on all fours with him who conceives the novel as a form of art properly concerned with any society save that at his own doors—not to speak of him who thinks it is brought to his own doors by the cheap serials.

Thus to found a charge of literary degeneration on destitution in the two fields of fiction and drama, may seem a course implying a false idea of moral proportion; but let the objector squarely ask himself whether there are any lines of literary production that can better give clues to the mental life of the time. If further tests be demanded, there remains the department of history, in which the phenomena are closely similar. Some fresh research there has been of recent years on the periods of Mary and the Restoration; but we are

at this moment barely able to produce a single historical scholar of the highest rank ; and the epoch which for many reasons might be supposed most to appeal to our literary men for treatment —the century and a half since the Union, or the century since the Rebellion — remains much less familiar than the corresponding period of English life to the Scottish generation which has grown up with Mr. Stevenson. One goes back, however, to the question of novel and play, satisfied that these give a decisive criterion. That country, one says, whose current imaginative literature includes no first-rate or fair second-rate presentation of its own contemporary life is on that side of human effort behind the age, and is inferentially backward in its general culture. And this is the present condition of imaginative literature in the land of Scott, our most brilliant contemporary *littérateur* shining in other walks than that of present-day naturalist fiction.

It is much easier, of course, to point out the shortcoming than to suggest how it is to be made up. But at least, supposing any cure to be in store, we shall be a little the likelier to come by it if we realise how the trouble arose. The kind of decline that, alongside of much material improvement, has overtaken Scotch life, is of course nothing different from the tendencies set up in the provincial towns of England by the drift of intellectual activity to London. Our defect on the side of the novel, taken with our sterility in

drama, is the best evidence of what has happened to us since Scott's day, because the novel has since Scott's day become the typical literary form of the age, and because it is, as before noted, that form of literary art which, positively or negatively, best reports local color. In the two generations covered by Scott's life, we see in Scotland a peculiarly ample crop of intellectual and literary capacity, in which not only does Scott produce Scotch fiction of the most important order, but Galt and Miss Ferrier (to cite no other names), seem to promise a persistence of native art. But just as our literary men in general have since tended to drift to London, so has our fiction tended to disappear. Carlyle's work could be done better—thanks partly to libraries—in London than in Edinburgh; so, in him and in a number of lesser men, we lost the culture-force of a local literary atmosphere; and defect superinduces defect, till it becomes almost a matter of course that our best men, unless tethered by professorships, go south. Edinburgh has become provincial as Manchester and Birmingham and Bristol are provincial, not for lack of Scotch capacity, but because London is the Scotch as well as the English capital, and drains all the provinces alike. All round there is locally lacking, with the literary atmosphere, that cosmopolitan inspiration which makes all the best fiction of the world; and thus it comes that, as the best English fiction plays freely on London life, and much on the life of the coun-

try and the small towns, but never on that of Birmingham or Liverpool, so what tolerable Scotch fiction we have tends only to deal fragmentarily with rural lives and never with the collective life of our larger towns ; though it also readily takes the paths of English fiction. All round, in short, our "provincial centres" suffer from the centripetal habit which makes London *the* centre.

If it be asked, then, in what way the desired improvement is likely to arise, the answer would seem to be that it will be from a general culture movement which shall yield a soil for productive intellectual life. The development which has gone on in Scotland in the past fifty years is essentially commercial, the "theological thaw" being thus far in the main superficial. A period of plain living and high thinking has been succeeded by one of plain (in a sense) thinking and (comparatively) high living, in Scotland as in the English provincial cities ; and salvation all round must be sought in a readjustment of activities, bottomed on a general bettering of education. We want on all hands a higher conception of life, which can come only of a manifold intellectual fertilisation. It will not come from the Church, which has, curiously enough, always flourished inversely to the prosperity of literature among us. Our two brilliant periods since the Reformation have been the latter half of last century, which our ecclesiastics now pronounce to have been religiously torpid, and the first generation of this century, before the

Disruption opened a new ecclesiastical era. And to-day our attention to our preachers is the measure of our neglect of our literary men. Let us ask ourselves what amount of honor, compared with that given to the pulpit, has been given to Burton and Skene ; how Scotland's consumption of sermons compares with her reception of Masson's ' Drummond of Hawthornden ' ; nay, what degree of interest we show in our new writers, as Mr. Lang, or even Mr. Stevenson, compared with the talk over the last new preacher. Mr. Lang's reputation rests on English suffrages ; and Scotland waited till Mr. Stevenson was widely famous in America, after being comparatively famous in England, before she showed any overt satisfaction in his performance. Some of his earlier efforts, one remembers, were stupidly snubbed in the Edinburgh Press. It is satisfying to be able to think that the swift turning of the tables in his case is prophetic of a general metamorphosis.

## RUSSIAN AND ENGLISH FICTION.

“POTAPENKO”; MR. WILDE; MR. KIPLING.  
(1891.)

THE excellence of Russian fiction remains surprising even after one has explained it to one's satisfaction on sociological grounds. Here is a nation which is only partly civilised, which only began to have any literature last century, and which has yet produced some of the truest, deepest, and most artistic imaginative literature of modern times. These excellences seem to be due to the very lateness and quickness of the transition from barbarism to literary culture among the middle and upper classes of Russia. The mass of the people remain further behind than perhaps any other European peasantry; but there is no society in which European culture is more intelligently and effectually assimilated than it has been among educated Russians in the last generation. And we get one more proof of the paralysing power of tradition and convention when we see that a race to which a high degree of culture is suddenly made accessible, without the creeping and fumbling preparation undergone by the nations which have produced that culture, may at one stride distance them all in the practice of one of the highest literary arts

(not to mention the other arts), namely, the writing of novels of life and character—in other words, the criticism of life by the representation of it.

These comments are inspired by the recent volume of the "Pseudonym Library" entitled 'A Russian Priest'. Transliterated, the author's Russian pseudonym (for one letter of which there is needed Russian type, while Greek letters misrepresent the value of another) runs "E. N. Potapenko", if my hand-to-mouth Russian is to be depended on. I never heard of him before; and the English translator-editor, Mr. W. Gaußen, gives no biographical details in his preface, merely mentioning that the story appeared in the leading Russian literary magazine a year ago. It is not only by far the best volume which has appeared in the little "Pseudonym" series (that would perhaps not be saying very much), but in its way it is a first-rate work of art. It of course does not deal with those sides of the problem of Russia with which we others are most familiar: had it done so it could not have been published; but in its way it seems quite unconstrained and unmutilated. It is indeed rather remarkable that such a book should be allowed by the Russian censorship to appear as it stands.

In the last six days I have read what seems the monstrous number of three novels; but "please sir, they were very little ones," and I was making long journeys. I mention this for purposes of comparison, the three novels in question being 'A

Russian Priest', Mr. Oscar Wilde's 'The Picture of Dorian Grey', and Mr. Rudyard Kipling's 'The Light that Failed'. The two latter writers are very clever men; Mr. Wilde writes admirable English prose; and Mr. Kipling is admitted by most men to be in his way a genius. But how artistically faulty is his way in comparison with that of a good Russian worker like this "Pota-penko"; and how poor artistically is Mr. Wilde's book, with all its pretentiousness, beside the strong simplicity of the Russian's. Crudely speaking, one might compare Mr. Kipling's work to underdone beef-steak, and Mr. Wilde's to extra "high" venison; the first is barbarically vicious, the other corrupt. Between them, the Russian stands as a model of sensitive simplicity and artistic truth.

Mr. Wilde, lacking original intellectual power, and always straining after striking effects, gets these on the one hand by the desperate pursuit of literary paradox, which he finally learns to secure by the very cheap process of inverting common-places, and on the other hand by an essentially melodramatic treatment of character, of which he has no competent grasp, but to which he gives violent and fantastic outline by abandoning all moderation and normal sequence of motive. To make miracles, monsters, and eccentrics, is the resource of the imperfect artist; and but for his limpid charm of style Mr. Wilde would be unreadable, for his paradoxes grow very tinselly after a

time. More complex is the literary case of Mr. Rudyard Kipling.

Looking at the main departments of imaginative English literature, which we tend first to think of under the latter term, we find no recent phenomenon more striking than the rapid popularity of Mr. Kipling, who began his literary career as a writer of short tales of Hindu and Anglo-Indian life, and who now seems likely to go to pieces as a wholesale producer for the English and American periodicals. There is wonderful cleverness in the new writer, a great deal of observation of character, and a happy knack of catching style. There is at the same time an entire adaptation to ordinary Philistine taste, and a plain incapacity to write a great novel. He is a writer of short stories, happily adapted to the taste alike of the mess-room, the upper-class drawing-room, the fashionable of both sexes, and Mr. Arnold's old butt, *l'homme moyen sensuel*. He has, as Mr. Howells sharply said of one of his books, a knowing, wink-tipping, hat-cocked-on-one-side kind of air, which goes straight to the heart of our great majority—the public which goes to our theatres, with their sentimental-sensational plays and their generally unspeakable acting. Charles Reade used to aim at this kind of effect, but he never caught it as Mr. Kipling has done, for lack of that Anglo-Indian mess-room and ball-room and club-room life which has given the latter his training. So clever is the result, indeed, that it is hardly fair

to compare it with our stage-plays ; for one can read Mr. Kipling with keen interest and often without disrespect ; but after all, fiction must needs be above drama, as our drama goes ; and his stories do meet the kind of taste that makes our drama what it now is. They represent stage art in fiction. You cannot think of Mr. Kipling, extremely clever as he is, in the same day with a great artist—with Balzac, with Thackeray, with Tourguénief, with George Eliot, with Maupassant, with Zola. All these, in their very different ways, strike deep into life : Mr. Kipling's vein is clearly the sentimental psychology of a thoroughly artificial society, the art of the dealer in the decorative and the *chic*. One must go to French to describe Mr. Kipling's art : it is *pimpant* ; the art of a great talent with a cheap culture and a flashy environment. Rather typical is his bad misquotation of Clough, with a reference to 'The City of Dreadful Night' for the passage.

Now, mark the moral. Had Mr. Kipling been a Frenchman, he might have become a really important artist ; perhaps a one-sided one, like Maupassant, who so rarely works away from the sexual ; but still a powerful one. Being an Englishman in the Indian Civil Service, he took to writing tales for the Anglo-Indian public, and developed a remarkable knack in the business. Without Bret Harte's early capacity for skilful prose, he has more than Bret Harte's eye for character, and all Bret Harte's taste for the senti-

mental-picturesque in life. Above all, he has Bret Harte's suggestion of—what shall I call it?—pseudo-sincerity, of semi-corrupt experience and knowing sympathy. The English "average sensual man", who cannot in general stand the psychological novel, feels that here is his ideal Master, one who "knows his way about", and can write cleverly of the by-ways. That is the kind of literary artist our present civilisation tends to produce. Where France has great masters of the repellent, the terrible, the morbid, the elemental, we have, for our best product, the skilful cook and seasoner of short stories which bite the tongue like brandy and soda, and are for the intellectual part of the man-about-town what that mixture is for the physical. In France Mr. Kipling would have had to make his 'Black and White', with its dramatic pictures of Hindu life, his average instead of his high-water mark; there his 'Plain Tales from the Hills' would have de-classed him; but in England the cheaper kind of work, with its palpable spicing and seasoning, and its more diluted realism, becomes the more popular, being the choice of the public which in art buys piquant and flashy "story-pictures" and anecdotal sculpture, and in drama thinks 'Claudian' a great tragedy. Already our spicy story-teller is doing rubbish for Christmas numbers, all editors being eager to buy from him; and, being an Anglo-Indian, he passes with our upper-class and middle-class mob of diners-out as

an authority on Indian statecraft. With his knowing consciousness of having plumbed his century, he repeats to us, in his best Bret Harte manner, the old story of the 'Dominant Race', in the tranquil conviction that to us in England it is a new revelation, we being a set of home-staying greenhorns who conceive Hindu life in terms of English. Mr. Kipling's political philosophy is of a piece with his art. His mess-room view of Indian destinies is about as valuable as his dialogue study of English idle-class sexual character which found its way into the *Fortnightly Review*.

Mr. Kipling, in fine, has the vices of immature talent, and in particular those vices which are special to English fiction. Reading the first chapters of 'The Light that Failed' I pronounced them second-rate "insanity-of-genius"; later the matter seemed to fall to third-rate insanity; and though yet later it rose to first-rate, and the interest of the story was vividly sustained, it was impossible to miss the fact that the character-painting was largely "swagger". Intellectually speaking, the tone is falsetto: these dashingly-drawn good fellows are not given to us in their true inwardness; they are "putting on side", and making-believe to be bigger and stronger and cleverer than they are. The tragic finish is first-rate "bravura work", as Carlyle called Kingsley's character of Sandy Mackaye, in 'Alton Locke'; but even in the finish you have a touch

of that fatal feeling which reaches you so often in the earlier chapters, as in so much other clever fiction—the feeling that if the author had been drawing a real character, and you had met that character in the flesh, you would have detected lights and shades and weak places which the author skips and slurs over. He recalls an artist who goes in for trick-work in paint ; he sacrifices observation to piquant effect, struggles to look knowing, forces the lights and the shadows and the color, and in general seeks to titillate the nerves of the average diner-out rather than to convince the subtle observers and the good readers. "There is cognac in it," as a partly Germanised English artist protested to me about certain French painting.

I learn that Mr. Kipling, in preparing his story for an American magazine, gave it a happy ending in deference to the commercial views of the proprietors, though he had from the first planned the tragic ending which it has in the book form. "Something with boiling oil in it" would seem to be the only adequate criticism of such an offence against literary morals ; and all Mr. Kipling says about commercial art in his own book, he would probably admit, is applicable to his own act. Such misdeeds may be set down, broadly speaking, to the debauched and sentimentalised taste of the English and American public, especially of one of the sexes—I dare not say which. However that may be, "Potapenko" shows no more trace than

does Tourguénief of conformity to vulgar appetite, any more than of the artistic tricks and vices of our English performers. He is as austere, as genuine, as the best Frenchmen, and he has a subtler simplicity, a more unsophisticated veracity, than theirs.

And yet all this praise may give a very mistaken notion of the book to an impressionable reader, and may lead to disappointments. Nothing could be simpler, nothing lower in key and tone, than this study of the experiences of a high-minded young Russian priest, who, after a seminary success which would entitle him to expect high preferment, deliberately elects to be a poor country "pope" or village parson. There is no hint of Nihilism in the book ; but Cyril tries in his way what the idealistic Nihilists have tried —to devote himself to the service and the elevation of the ignorant peasants. The book is made up of the record of his difficulties, up to a point at which his devotion during a period of famine wins him a moral triumph among his villagers. Here the story very abruptly ends, leaving unsolved the problem of Cyril's domestic life, which has been sharply strained by the intervention of his wife's parents, indignant at his disregard of her hardships. And the reader can hardly escape a suspicion that in the end the ardent young priest is destined to frustration and failure.

To a freethinker 'A Russian Priest' is peculiarly interesting. I think "Potapenko" is a

rationalist, but an absolutely and artistically impartial one, since his treatment of the religious element is as sympathetic as George Eliot's without her sermonising and sentimentalism. He reveals a curious state of things among the Russian country priesthood, who, as the phrase goes, are seen to be wont to "traffic in sacred things" just as the mercenary priests of Western Europe did in the Middle Ages—and more recently. I see that some Anglican readers are complacent about the superiority of the English ecclesiastical system to the Russian in point of clerical culture and amenity generally. But it is all a question of stage of civilisation. The freethinker can see in this veracious and unrestrained picture of Russian ecclesiasticism one more proof of the historic futility of Christianity as a civilising force in itself. Once more we see that it is civilisation that improves Christianity, not Christianity that promotes civilisation. For the Greek Church is as much an illustration of Christianity in action as the Catholic or Protestant.

It brings us, indeed, into much more direct contact than these now do with the original elements of Christianity. It keeps up for our enlightenment the primitive worship of images, the primitive relation of people to clergy ; and it preserves for us the very sound of the ancient names. The name we sound "Gabriel" is here written Gavriil (Gavree-eel) which was its Greek pronunciation ; and it is presumably an inconsistency on the trans-

lator's part to write "*Cyril*". But these are small matters. The historic value of the book lies in the unforced and unaffected picture it gives of the at best primitive and generally sordid character of the relations of the Russian clergy to the people. Of culture they have next to none ; and their mercenariness is such that Cyril's philanthropic devotion, though in its way not a whit more unselfish than that of many of the atheistic Nihilists, marks him out as a unique figure in the priesthood.

In the work of "*Potapenko*", however, there is no touch of propagandist purpose. His art, I repeat, is absolutely impartial. He paints-in the ecclesiastical details as he does every other, without prejudice or bias. He never discusses beliefs, one way or another : when he introduces the (at first) indifferentist lady of the manor he does not even say whether she had been at bottom sceptical ; and indeed this treatment suggests that the censorship may have had some repressive influence. Cyril's enthusiasm and humanistic pietism are indicated without discussion. And so much of Shaksperean power has the author that he makes us see the situation from different sides with equal success. Cyril has all the egoism of the enthusiast : he is not at all considerate of his poor little wife, leaving her to get on as best she can without companionship, and even with insufficient food, while he realises his ideal of priestly devotion. He is prepared to let the other priests

and officials suffer the pinch of poverty in the same way when he interferes with their perquisites. And we see the naturalness of their commercialism, poor devils, and the hardship of the little wife's lot, and the justice of her parents' exasperation, without ever losing our sense of the exaltation and purity of the enthusiast's motives. Perhaps, indeed, he is over-idealised : we want in his case a little more analysis. But the drawing is wonderfully firm and easeful in its skill.

There is just one touch of crimson color, so to speak : the development of the lady of the manor (I decline to transcribe her polysyllabic name)—one of those strange women whom we meet only in Russian fiction, and who seem to be made of different clay from ours, or to retain in their intense and abnormal natures some elements of waywardness which belong to the barbaric female. Slightly touched in, we yet feel that she is real, with all her strangeness. Indeed there is not a figure in the book, however slightly drawn, that does not strike one as being studied from the life ; and the ease and certainty of the reproduction are really masterly. Yet so unobtrusive is it all, so perfectly is the artist concealed by his work, so subdued is his tone throughout, so unimpassioned is his sounding of the one note of potent passion which he introduces, that I fear some readers will think it dull ; and I am almost sure the whiskey-and-water school of critics will pronounce it shadowy. For myself, I can only won-

der once more that, in that strange country, where brutal power seems to be throttling all the highest life of the people, and where competent testimony reveals so much of consequent demoralisation and falsity, there yet seems to be no cessation in the production of truthful literary art, since here yet another novelist yields us a performance to which, for justice of perception, soundness and purity of taste, and skill of workmanship, we in England with all our freedom can offer no parallel.

## ELIZABETHAN LYRICS.\*

To go through the two dainty volumes of Elizabethan lyrics which have been compiled for his countrymen by Mr. A. H. Bullen, most single-hearted of Elizabethanists, is to enter some such artistic atmosphere as belongs to a gallery of "Old Masters". I am not pitching the note too high, as the haunter of galleries knows. They are not all masterly, the Old Masters: at times they recall Mark Twain's "page" who did not amount to more than a paragraph: they are not seldom unquestionably Masters by courtesy, Old Apprentices, so to speak, promoted on the score of age. But age, somehow, wonderfully mellows them all, and one lingers over their third-rate as over their best work, enjoying its charm and noting its little weaknesses or quaintnesses, with a wistful sense of the "sorrow and the labor and the passing away of men". And if so over old pictures, not less so over old songs, which one can dip into and muse over at will, free of the tyranny of the gallery, which half defeats its end.

Sooth to say, the out-and-out Masters are not more plentiful in song than in color; and in the one art as in the other it is a rare find that dis-

\* "Lyrics from the Dramatists of the Elizabethan Age," and "Lyrics from the Song Books of the Elizabethan Age": both edited by A. H. Bullen.

closes a masterpiece hitherto unproclaimed. In Mr. Bullen's *Lyrics from the Dramatists* we learn once more that Shakspere could beat them all when he fairly tried, at song-writing as at play-writing. The magical vibration of 'Take, oh take those lips away,' 'Full fathom five thy father lies,' 'Hark, hark, the lark at heaven's gate sings,' rises easily over all the notes that here are sounded, silvery sweet though many of them be. But, even as some of the brave brotherhood of those "spacious times" could throw off in a happy hour touches of dramatic speech which Shakspere need not have been sorry to sign, so they could strike a note of song at times which only his best could beat. And some such perfect joy as that of lighting on, say, the lovely St. Catharine of Luini among a roomful of merely well-meant efforts in the present exhibition at Burlington House, may come to the lover of poetry here and there in Mr. Bullen's lyrics from the dramatists. And he must be as perverse as Mr. Ruskin who should begin to draw jealous comparisons, to whatever end, between the masterpieces of the minor and the greater masters, as Mr. Ruskin did between Luini and Leonardo.

Take, for instance, the wholly felicitous opening of the 'Evening Knell' in Fletcher's 'Faithful Shepherdess', which Emerson has introduced to so many readers :

Shepherds all, and maidens fair,  
Fold your flocks up, for the air

'Gins to thicken, and the sun  
Already his great course hath run.  
See the dewdrops how they kiss  
Every little flower that is,  
Hanging on their velvet heads  
Like a rope of crystal beads:  
*See the heavy clouds low falling,*  
*And bright Hesperus down calling*  
*The dead Night from underground.*

He should have stopped there, at his finest cadence. But it took Shakspere to know quite how and when to stop, for a perfect success.

And that brings us to an old question: *Did Shakspere write the third stanza of 'Under the Greenwood Tree'?* I can no more believe that he would himself so spoil the clear charm of the two stanzas with their one refrain, than I can conceive that he wrote that song in 'Cymbeline' which has the lines:

Golden lads and girls all must,  
As chimney-sweepers, come to dust.

Mr. Lowell shall never persuade me that such a phrase as "the all-dreaded thunder-stone" is so Shaksperean as to count against the impossible poverty of the bulk of the song. Mr. Bullen has won such a wealth of golden opinions as an editor that one need not hesitate to give him one bad mark for including that abortion in an anthology.

But who will not, on the other hand, give him new commendation for his suggestion that "Roses, their sharp spines being gone", in 'The Two Noble Kinsmen', is Shakspere's own? If anything in that tantalising play can confidently

be said to have the true Shaksperean ring, may not these two stanzas of that song be so certified?

Roses, their sharp spines being gone,  
Not royal in their smells alone,

    But in their hue ;  
Maiden pinks of odor faint,  
Daisies smell-less, yet most quaint,  
    And sweet thyme true ;

Primrose, firstborn child of Ver,  
Merry springtime's harbinger,

    With harebells dim ;  
Ox lips in their cradles growing,  
Marigolds on deathbeds blowing,  
    Larks'-heels trim.

Could Fletcher have compassed that secure cadence, that thrilling rhythm, that electrical touch? It seems cruel to the lesser master to deny him *à priori* such a felicity; but who can miss the subtle presence of the greater? That "harebells dim", for instance, is it not the specific and peculiar impression made on the eye of him who wrote those incomparable lines :

Daffodils

That come before the swallow dares, and take  
The winds of March with beauty ; *Violets dim*,  
But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes,  
Or Cytherea's breath—?

If we take from Fletcher the all-too-Shaksperean song of the flowers, we give him the 'Orpheus with his lute made trees', which Mr. Bullen, rightly following the consensus of the critics, attributes to Fletcher with so much else of Henry VIII; the more reasonably because it is the very

rhythm of his 'God Lyæus, ever young'. And when all is said, the author of these songs, and of the song to Pan, and of 'Hence all you vain delights', and of 'Beauty clear and fair', has a great treasury left that none can dispute him.

On just one point will I venture to challenge Mr. Bullen's expert judgment, and its expression in his selection. He writes: "With all my admiration for Ben Jonson, I venture to think that his lyrics—excellent as they frequently are—want the natural magic that we find in the songs of some of his less famous contemporaries. . . . We admire the compactness of thought and the aptness of expression. . . . Yet somehow the wayward inspiration of poets who have no claim to be Jonson's peers is more powerfully attractive." No doubt this is in a measure just; but has Mr. Bullen here given Jonson a proper hearing? Why, for instance, does he not give this song from the 'Masque of Beauty'? :

So Beauty on the waters stood  
When Love had sever'd earth from flood!  
So when he parted air from fire,  
He did with concord all inspire!  
And then a motion he them taught,  
That elder than himself was thought,  
Which thought was yet the child of earth,  
For love is elder than his birth.

The familiar 'Drink to me only with thine eyes' is doubtless here excluded because it is in 'The Forest' and not in a play; as is also, presumably, the song 'Follow a shadow, it still flies you'—not to speak of the 'Oh, do not wanton with those

eyes', which Gifford blunderingly overpraises; but these, and above all the first, should not be forgotten. The 'Drink to me only with thine eyes' is a wonderfully happy distillation from a Greek pedant's conceits; every way luckier, surely, than Ben's version of Catallus' *Vivamus, mea Lesbia, atque amemus* (which, indeed, one would think, wholly defied imitation, were it not for the consummate rendering of Professor Ellis). But 'So Beauty on the waters stood' is surely a bit of true poetry. Nay, is there not the true "wayward" charm of this song from the 'Masque of Blackness'?

Daughters of the subtle flood,  
Do not let earth longer entertain you:

*1st Echo.* Let earth longer entertain you:  
*2nd Echo.* Longer entertain you.

'Tis to them enough of good  
That you give this little hope to gain you:  
*1st Echo.* Give this little hope to gain you:  
*2nd Echo.* Little hope to gain you.

If they love  
You shall quickly see;  
For when to flight you move,  
They'll follow you, the more you flee.  
*1st Echo.* Follow you, the more you flee.  
*2nd Echo.* The more you flee.

If not, impute it to each other's matter  
They are but earth, and what you vow'd was water:  
*1st Echo.* And what you vow'd was water:  
*2nd Echo.* You vow'd was water.

There is a real lyric felicity in the management of the "repetend" here. Shakspere did it best, as usual, in 'Take, oh take those lips away'; and the difficulty becomes very apparent in the stanza

which somebody else added, and which Mr. Bullen rightly withholds.

I have lingered so long over old delights that I have no space left to deal with the 'Lyrics from the Elizabethan Song-books'. But indeed these have a quite different interest. They simply cannot compare for poetic merit with the lyrics of the dramatists, who wrote out of the fulness of their poetic hearts, whereas the manifold song-books testify primarily to the wonderful abundance of *music* in the same period, which set scores of tuneful amateurs producing words for singing. Pretty enough their productions often are; but there is not one of them which can be named beside that sounding song of Beaumont's, 'Shake off your heavy trance' [Mr. Bullen has "you heavy trance", surely by oversight?]; nay, there is hardly anything from the song-books as good as Shirley's 'You virgins, that did late despair', or Heywood's 'Pack, clouds, away, and welcome, day!' or 'Hail, beauteous Dian, queen of shades'. It is odd that the song-books should be the less fertile in true songs; but so it is.

The explanation above given will perhaps suffice. But even on that view, it is peculiarly interesting to note what a multitude of song-books there was in the days ere Puritanism blasted the arts. Their titles may be counted here by dozens, and most of us would never have heard of a tithe of them but for Mr. Bullen's collections. What this list of titles tells us is that in Elizabethan

days England was on the way to be as great in music as she then became in drama, and was to become in epic and other poetry. There must have been (there is plenty of other evidence) as much music in England then as in Italy, and more than in Germany. . . But "came the grim Fury with the abhorred shears": the spirit of Puritanism rose against the "simple, sensuous, and passionate" art (nine out of ten of the old song-book lyrics seem to have been love-songs), and, suppressing it because of its associations, threw back English musical culture perhaps two hundred years. For the Restoration temper lacked the spirit of music; and the later generations, thrown on the "harvest of the mind", could much better yield new poetry than begin again the development of music. *Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum.*

## GERMAN CRITICISM.

(1888.)

PEOPLE in search of something quite fresh in the way of amusement may be expected, if they "know their way about" in literature, to turn with alacrity to a newly-published German work on Thackeray, entitled *Ein Pessimist als Dichter*. The indignant notice of that composition in the *Academy*, from which I ascertain its existence, is altogether to be deprecated; indeed, to fall foul of the estimable author for his total destitution in the matter of humor, as does the *Academy* critic, is a course which could occur only to a writer himself imperfectly endowed in that direction. Herr Conrad, we are told, "takes quite seriously, and is much shocked by, Thackeray's frequent assertions that the man of letters is a workman like other workmen." What more delectable attitude, one would like to know, could Herr Conrad have taken up? Only one wishes Thackeray were alive to enjoy it with his countrymen—and to comment on it, which he would have done in a fashion very different from that of the *Academy*. It is not often that such a titillation of the literary sense is to be had, even from German criticism. A "very silly treatise" is the *Academy's* characterisation of Herr Conrad's book, with the grave intimation: "We do not often use such strong expressions

as this, but we do not think that anyone who has read the tractate will quarrel with us." "We" have not read the tractate, but sincerely hope to do so, and we are sure, from the *Academy's* own testimony, that we shall quarrel as much with its language then as we do now. It does not reveal the proper spirit. "We have often been irritated," says the writer, "by the German affectation of using 'Dichter' indifferently for poet and prose writer of fiction, and this is especially annoying in Herr Conrad's very silly treatise on Thackeray." Now, the wide German application of "Dichter" is not an affectation: not to speak of the authority of precedent, it is the *bonâ fide* expression of the German critical attitude towards *belles lettres*, and is thus half the secret of the funniness of the department of German literature to which Herr Conrad's work is the latest contribution. Nothing could be more genuine and typically German than the writing on Thackeray under the title, 'A Pessimist as *Dichter*'; and only the momentary wrongness of his attitude and temper could make the English critic feel that the word was especially irritating in Herr Conrad's case. To us, for whom Thackeray is neither a pessimist nor a *Dichter*, the latter term seems to lend a Shaksperian breadth to Herr Conrad's Teutonic misconception of his subject. Without the primeval flavor of that belated substantive there would be, to judge from the *Academy's* account, an unsatisfactory impression of partial pro-

priety about his method. Without the "Dichter" there might be some excuse for irritation ; with it there is none. We are in the full moonshine of German sentiment.

Herr Conrad's book, still judged by the Academy's notice, raises afresh the famous old problem propounded by the Abbé Bouhours, and rendered familiar among us by Carlyle, who sought to handle it with sarcasm : "Whether it is possible for a German to have *esprit*?" Carlyle, as it happened, was too bent on being witty to put much wit in his answer, which indeed failed to take account of the special point of the query as it reads to the modern sense. From the French point of view, the most decisive answer is the overwhelming rejoinder understood to have been made by a German author in an exhaustive work entitled *Vindiciae nominis Germanici*. That controversialist at least was not the desiderated German of *esprit* ; and after all that has come and gone since, including the war, the mocking echo of the question of the otherwise forgotten Abbé seems to thrive in the vacancy at which it is launched. *Esprit* is still the appanage of the French. It is not withheld, let us humbly suggest, from another neighbouring race, and it flourishes on the other side of the Atlantic among a population certainly well dashed with German ; but the united Fatherland continues to present to literary Europe that colossal simplicity of literary method which presumably moved Père Bouhours to raise his cele-

brated problem. It would seem, indeed, as if the qualities in which the German intellect is really strong were bound to preclude progress in the direction of that signified by the term *esprit*. The merits of German criticism are confessedly patience and thoroughness of contemplation, undirected by anything of what we mean by inspiration. In its best forms it methodically covers the whole of the subject in hand, mastering all details, not for their own sake, but in order to get at the widest available generalisation from them ; and in its devoted pursuit of the general or abstract, it heroically turns its back on what to concrete intelligences is the whole gist of the matter. Hence the profundity of German philosophy, in which metaphysical analysis is carried to the stage of intellectual swoon. It is only another phase of the same determined thoroughness which presents modern science with prodigies of factual research in which all idea of unifying principle is lost : the true Teuton is never sated in an investigation till he has got in sight of the infinite in one way or the other. How all this relates itself to *esprit* or the concrete appreciation of literature and art is sufficiently obvious. To the impartial Teutonic method all facts are of equal importance, and either the accidents of the case figure on a par with the essentials, or both alike are lost sight of in a generalisation so deep as to leave all concrete phenomena out of sight. Like the elephant's trunk, which can alternately rend oaks and pick up six-

pences, the German literary sense now lays strategie siege to a verbal triviality, and anon sums up a literature in terms of its supposed relation to the cosmos. Thus it is that the German criticism of Shakspeare, to which so many Britons look up awestruck, is so often a mixture of misguided pedantry and blank metaphysical abstraction, in which Shakspeare is misunderstood in the letter and metamorphosed in the spirit past human recognition.

All this, of course, could not have won prestige unless it had been recommended by some real gift of seeing things in totality ; and it would be black ingratitude to deny that the Germans have taught us something in that way. Even in the work of Herr Conrad, the *Academy* notwithstanding, there appears to be some perception of general truths in regard to Thackeray. The *Academy* particularly denounces him for " setting down the high value now put on Thackeray to the influence of ' Naturalist ' tendencies." " Now," says the indignant critic, " we happen to know pretty intimately some of the chief living Thackeray-worshippers, and we can answer for it that they are anti-Naturalists to a man." But here the German is substantially in the right. For one thing, he was doubtless thinking of the study of Thackeray in Germany, where, till the other day, Dickens ranked as the chief English novelist ; and where a transition to Thackeray must needs mean a change towards Naturalism. Besides, whatever the distinguished literary friends of the *Academy* critic may fancy, Thackeray is em-

phatically on the Naturalist line of evolution in fiction, carrying on previous English tradition in his choice of matter, and anticipating modern tendency in minimising plot. But if Herr Conrad hits on a general truth in this regard, we do not doubt he makes amends in other ways. An author who, if the *Academy* is to be believed, is "without even a conception of what humor is," and who is seriously shocked by Thackeray's flippancies as to the literary vocation, must produce some entertaining results in reckoning up the author of 'Vanity Fair'. There has been at times cause for fear that the German genius would browbeat native faculty in the matter of Shakspere; but one is fain to think we are safe as regards Thackeray — at least for the present. In view of the modernness of his language, it must be some time before we need to read him with a German commentary, and till that comes upon us we shall be haply free to keep our brows unbent over his soft-hearted cynicism and his paternal pessimism, and to smile at his humor without philosophic explanations of its conscious and sub-conscious relation to the spirit of the age. But one flinches at the thought of what may be in store for the youth of Germany in the case of Thackeray becoming a German classic, with annotations. What the German *Gelehrte* can do in that way is no laughing matter. Turning to the Pitt Press 'Goethe's Boyhood', edited for English schools by Wilhelm Wagner, Ph.D., we find such flowers of commentary as

this: " *ein kleines Tischchen* is, in a certain sense, a tautology, the dim. *Tischchen* expressing something small by itself without the adj. *klein*. But the sense may be ' a very small table '." It may; there is no challenging a German editor when he is fairly roused. And when Goethe ventures to say that in his boyhood he and his playmates at Frankfurt hoped " to live to see a coronation with their eyes " (*eine Kronung mit Augen zu erleben*), this is how Professor Dr. Wagner lets him have it in the notes: " The expression is somewhat strange on account of its brevity. All would be clear, if it were *eine Kronung zu erleben und mit (eigenen) Augen zu sehen*." It certainly would; but Goethe was a half Greek, half cosmopolitan, and it is only the true modern German of the Empire who can attain such consummate clearness. And still we are left querying, Can a German editor have *esprit*?

## SCHOPENHAUER.

### I.

PROFESSOR WALLACE, writing the Life of Schopenhauer, need hardly have made even his mild biographical complaint about the "somewhat uneventful life" of that philosopher. No philosopher's life, perhaps, ever furnished a more vivid commentary on his system: and if the "events" of such men's lives be in general unexciting in themselves, those of Schopenhauer's are peculiarly full of interest for readers who care about the study of character. Of most philosophers it may be said that their systems are fully understood only when their lives are known, in respect not merely of "incidents" but of their whole intellectual development. The light cast by that may sometimes be only secondary; but in other cases it is of the first importance, as in that of Kant, whose effort to establish a theory of knowledge becomes so much more intelligible when we remember that it was made by a man who had previously done much scientific speculation of an original sort. And Schopenhauer's system above all becomes newly transparent for us when we read it in the light of his life. Inconsistently enough, though doubtless on the spur of the instinct of self-preservation, did he write, as Professor Wallace quotes in his preface, that "those who, instead of studying the

thoughts of a philosopher, make themselves acquainted with his life and history, are like people who, instead of occupying themselves with a picture, are rather occupied with its frame, reflecting on the taste of its carving, and the nature of its gilding". That is a typically German analogy, infelicitous, cumbrous, unconvincing; and Schopenhauer was the last thinker who should have made it. Doubtless it is unprofitable to study a philosopher's life without heeding his philosophy at all, but who ever does that? And who has less right to deprecate the close study of the thinker's life than Schopenhauer, who, in the words of his present competent biographer, "maintains that it is not a supervening thought which governs the universe, but an indwelling and non-rational nature, which only uses intellect as an instrument towards the attainment of ends it receives and tries distinctly to formulate"? If he had been—if he could have been—consistent, he would have told us to look for the key to his philosophy in his character, which was manifested in his life; since, as he says again, "my philosophy makes life, the system of feelings and desires, supreme; and leaves knowledge merely the post of observer." Thus, on his own showing, his philosophy formulated his personal relation to his environment only in terms of the metaphysical analysis which was his particular way of energising. But his inconsistency on this point is fundamental and final, and comes out at times in contextual sentences.

"There is," he explicitly wrote, "no one philosophy existing and acceptable for all human beings. The difference in the degree of intelligence is much too great for that. The true philosophy, when it appears, will command the attention only of a few, and these, heads of the first order; though, of course, others may yield allegiance to it on authority, as from a sense of their incapacity they are constantly inclined to do. Beside it, there will always be other philosophies for the second, third, fourth class, whereof those for the lower classes present themselves mostly as religious, in the garb, that is to say, mostly of unconditional authority. . . . For, in the sense in which there is one mathematics for all, there cannot be one philosophy for all." What is this but saying that there can be no "true philosophy?" That is, indeed, the clear, logical outcome of Schopenhauer's own positions, which he is always seeking to evade in order to establish the claims of his own indestructible egoism. Late in life he "confided to one of his disciples that upon completing his chief work in its first draft he felt so convinced of having solved the enigma of the world that he thought of having his signet ring carved with the image of the Sphinx throwing herself down the abyss." And, with all his anti-theism, he was capable of writing in his old age that his philosophy "may be called a revelation. It is inspired by the spirit of truth; in the fourth book there are even some paragraphs which may be considered to

be dictated by the Holy Ghost." On which we can only repeat what Strauss said of the Schopenhauerian system in another aspect, that it cuts the bough it sits upon. If the 'Will to Live' be illusion, so, on Schopenhauer's own principle, must be the 'Will to Die'; and one man's reading of the riddle, in terms of intuition or transcendental knowledge, is no more conclusive than any other's.

In point of fact, as he partly indicated, though Professor Wallace perhaps does not sufficiently emphasise the fact, Schopenhauer's system is only an elaborate re-statement of the discovery long ago made as to the emptiness of Desire by the brooding metaphysicians of India, in whose case the physiological explanation is perhaps more obvious than in that of Schopenhauer, though his doctrine unwittingly obtrudes it. But in his case, too, it is furnished by his life. That sense of the vainness of impulse, reached in India by way of physical inanition, came to him on one side through an organisation so curiously flawed in its strength that, preacher as he was of the gospel of mortification of the will to live, he fled in affright from the cholera, and manifested in the prime of his life an abject terror of poverty. On the intellectual side, again, he had a keen and penetrating faculty of analysis, which, with the results of Kant and Fichte before it, soon reached the discovery that philosophy, in the sense of an explanation of the universe, is futile. But, as his whole career showed, in him the 'Will to Live' meant

an intense and absorbing egoism, and his discovery took the shape of an elaborate scheme of pessimism, claiming to be "the true philosophy". As in his minor writings on life and character he is always summing up things and people in terms of his own narrow but intense experience, so in his philosophy that experience is the formation of his metaphysic. Thus he is one of the most fascinating of modern personalities, not in the sense of being attractive, for he is often odious, but as presenting a vigorous combination of those very phases of the 'Will to Live' which he sought to analyse. Vain, powerful, sensual, austere, selfish, profound, philosophic, querulous, pessimistic, tenacious of life, energetic, and quietistic, he is in a manner mankind's epitome, in German. For German he is in his crudity of form and rawness of temper, and in that arrogance and arbitrariness which his nation tends to express on the one hand in its latter-day manners, and on the other hand in its philosophy—doubtless for the same reason that it feels so confident of its strength. In Schopenhauer there is an abundance of that reckless self-reliance which carries so many a strong German thinker past science and past sense, and which makes Hegel, for instance, write a quantity of stuff that even his worshipper, Dr. Hutchison Stirling, distractedly pronounces to be mere maundering. Schopenhauer gave himself, indeed, a tolerable training for philosophy; but he could not give himself the profound patience which

builds up true science. Hence his system, extremely interesting as it is, and widely known as it has latterly become, will probably never have any dominance among students, now that so many other systems have risen and fallen, to the edification of the critical. After all his proclamation that "the true philosophy" would appeal only to the best heads, he found his adherents among the non-experts, and was fain to make out that these were the best. To Professor Wallace, praise is due for his conscientious and able presentment alike of the philosophy and the life of his subject. His book is naturally more satisfying on the philosophic side than the interesting sketch by Miss Zimmern, which first made Schopenhauer's personality well known to English readers. But the Professor writes often stiffly, and not always soundly. He falls frequently into awkward phrases, and sometimes into perfunctory reasoning, as in his comments on Schopenhauer's self-regarding doctrine of genius. "In the main," he writes, "Schopenhauer has right on his side. . . . All true art has a charm and a glory, and is crowned by a gracious, sacred nimbus which seldom falls to the lot of the worker in science." The sentence we have elided expands this futile proposition, which after another piece of verbalism is quashed by the admission that the "chief captains of science" are as truly men of genius, of insight and imagination, as the chief poets, and that artists are often enough without genius. Then, why not have said

so at first? Professor Wallace, with needless hesitation, goes on to point out what is plainly true, that the path of the intuitionist is "often visited by the mists and fogs of illusion and self-deception," and he has some further judicious comments; but he does not seem to have realised the not very deep truth that all knowledge proceeds by way of leaps which are afterwards verified, and that those of the genius are only longer and harder than those of the "man of talent". It is, however, hardly fair to ask from a philosopher's biographer more than a good exposition of his subject's life and doctrine, and this Professor Wallace undoubtedly gives us, the care and competence of his work making amends for its lack of literary ease.

## II.

THE service which Mr. T. Bailey Saunders is doing to the reputation of Schopenhauer will be extended not a little by the fresh volume of selections, the fourth in his "Schopenhauer Series", which he has entitled 'The Art of Literature'. Schopenhauer, whatever we think of his philosophy—and some of us think it is what the Germans call an *unvollkommenes Denken*—has won that status which makes a man's sayings on any subject worth discussing, if only because they are his. And few men have had in a higher degree the faculty of making their *obiter dicta* keep the reader's ear. In

this respect, making deductions for German deficiency in epigram, Schopenhauer recalls, among our own writers, Johnson and Carlyle, who make one remember them whether with a laugh or a grimace, with assent or with execration.

It cannot be said, indeed, that Schopenhauer's sayings have yet obtained a wide currency among Germans. His whole performance has still too recent a vogue for that; and at the present moment the German people are not much inclined to listen to a writer who is forever girding at their imperfections. Since 1870, they are neither to hold nor to bind in their esteem of all things Teutonic; and a large part of Schopenhauer's talk runs to the unfavorable comparison of Teutonic with French and English characteristics. Heine is in scant favor with them for similar reasons, though he certainly did not overpraise English characteristics. His prose is such as a Frenchman or Englishman can read with real pleasure; and the Teutons protest accordingly that it is un-German. Conceive then how they will take this of Schopenhauer: "The Frenchman strings his thoughts together, as far as he can" [certainly that is a saving clause] "in the most logical and natural order, and so lays them before his reader one after the other for convenient deliberation, so that every one of them may receive undivided attention. The German, on the other hand, weaves them together into a sentence which he twists and crosses, and crosses and twists again; because he

wants to say six things all at once, instead of advancing them one by one." But it is perfectly true ; and, between Schopenhauer and Mark Twain, Germany must one day learn the lesson. In the art of writing prose it remains two hundred years behind England ; which was at least a hundred years after France in attaining a good prose style.

Indeed, Schopenhauer himself, writing on style, exemplifies other German defects than those he blames. He is nationally unsubtle in phrase ; raw in his satire ; cumbrous in his images. He fights with the club, not with the rapier ; and not seldom creates in a foreign reader that sense of surprise so often set up by Germans, at the spectacle of a cultured and widely-read man writing in a style and temper which in France and England are associated with illiteracy. The German grasp and comprehensiveness still involve the heavy-handedness of the manual laborer. Take one of his sentences on inflated writers : "They take so much pleasure in bombast, and write in such a high-flown, bloated, affected, and hyperbolical style, that their prototype is *Ancient Pistol*, whom his friend Falstaff once impatiently told to say what he had to say 'like a man of this world' ". And this of journalists : "Herein they are like little dogs ; if anything stirs, they immediately set up a shrill bark". So writes the rural controversialist, out of Germany, to the local paper. I have not the German before me to compare with Mr. Saunders'

translation ; but I doubt not that it in no way worsens the original.

In Schopenhauer, however, crudity of phrase rests always on an abundant vigor of intelligence ; and the two sentences just cited are led up to by passages of penetrating criticism, in which the style kindles into what is so hard for German style to attain to—epigram. “Authors should use common words to say uncommon things”, is one of these hits ; and this is another : “The newspaper is the second hand in the clock of history ; and it is not only made of baser metal than those which point to the minute and the hour, but it seldom goes right”. This too is shrewd if not exact : “Exaggeration of every kind is as essential to journalism as it is to the dramatic art ; for the object of journalism is to make events go as far as possible”. And this is suggestive : “The pen is to thought what the stick is to walking”.

But what gives resonance to this as perhaps to most of Schopenhauer’s writing is the note of personality that sounds through it all. Of all philosophers he is most perceptibly a talking temperament. Rarely does he forget himself, and his personal relation to his generation, in a genuine effort at true analysis. Throughout this volume we are listening, not to a critic competently going about his business, but to the man Schopenhauer stridently setting forth the qualities which enable men to succeed with their contemporaries, and the impossibility that really great work—that is, such

as Schopenhauer's—should meet due recognition during its author's lifetime. When he is discussing inflation of style, you feel he is thinking of one or other of the philosophers whom he detested. When he is defining genius and the proper way of employing the mind, he is transcribing from his own symptoms and practice. He is not seeking for æsthetic truth as such. When he decides that "the wig is the appropriate symbol of the man of learning, pure and simple," and insists that the better part is his who subordinates his learning to his own observation and thinking, he is not saying anything that is new. Other men have dwelt on the futility of mere book-reading as intelligently as he, but few of them convey such a sense of their contempt for the particular persons whom they have in their mind's eye in writing. You seem to hear him growling across the table.

Growling indeed makes up the larger part of this volume, as is befitting when the author is a pessimist by temperament. For in these minor writings there is none of the serenity that is claimed to come of a philosophically pessimistic view of life: rather there is the chronic bitterness of the man who feels that in certain ways life has gone ill with himself. You are disposed to ask, Why all this indignation and pother over a few of the manifestations of the tendency of things to go wrong? "Literary journals," cries the testy old man of letters, "should be a dam against the unconscionable scribbling of the age, and the ever

increasing deluge of bad and useless books . . . instead of furthering these evils by a miserable toleration, which plays into the hands of the author and publisher, and robs the reader of his time and money. . . . As Goethe once remarked to me, nowhere is there so much dishonesty as in literature". All very true; but how should literature escape corruption in some form in a world in which evil predominates? And what is the use of demanding reform when our final business is just to mortify the Will to Live? And why, above all, should the philosopher be perpetually cursing the stupidity of mankind, as here, because it cannot appreciate masterpieces, and feeds on the shallow and the insipid? Is this the temper of philosophy over the spectacle of the futility and frustration of things? Is it that the world would have taken a very different color if only contemporary Europe had properly appreciated the genius of Arthur Schopenhauer?

It would be too much to say that that is the end of the whole matter. Harriet Martineau was convinced that Carlyle would have been much less obtrusively famous if he had been earlier famous; but she was wrong in supposing him to grow less so after he became famous; and Schopenhauer, like Carlyle, seems to have had a bias of dissatisfaction from his birth. It is plainly legible in both of the portraits in his biography. Had he become early famous, he would still have been exasperated by "the nonsense of Fichte, Schelling, Jacobi,

Hegel," even if it had not " crowded out " Kant : had his own philosophic career been prosperous, he would none the less have passioned over those forms of human weakness, male and female, which are not concerned with the non-recognition of the true philosophy. And he would have had an abundance of texts, no doubt. But the fact remains for us that, as it was, his bitterness turned largely on his own unpopularity, and on the vogue of his rivals. Mr. Saunders suppresses one passage of abuse of Hegel, confessing that he for one has " had enough of the subject " in the previous volumes of his translations, and surmising that the readers feel likewise. So far does the sage's quivering self-love get uppermost, that he appends to one of his protests about the envious suppression of excellence the footnote : " If the professors of philosophy should chance to think that I am here hinting at them and the tactics they have for more than thirty years pursued towards my works, they have hit the nail upon the head ". It is not easy to show greater weakness than that, in the name of philosophy. We are driven back on the old question, Is Schopenhauer's pessimism anything more than his personal equation ?

Well, it is more : he was too acute and energetic a man not to have caught sight of some general truths in summing up the universe ; but he was not a great enough man, not enough of a scientific philosopher, too much of a wilful egoist, to produce a summary of things which should satisfy

independent thinkers. In this one volume of essays, after making us feel that his philosophy is in large part a translation of his personal grievances, he sets us challenging it on its merits. In the essay On Genius—a characteristic piece of self-study, in which, citing an example of Goethe's serenity, he declares that "we, the salt of the earth, ought to imitate him," and apparently assumes that he himself could, poor man—we have the formula that "A genius has a double intellect, *one for himself and the service of his will; the other for the world . . .*"; and on the next page the proposition that "a double intellect like this must, as a rule, *obstruct the service of the will*; and this explains the poor capacity shown by genius in the conduct of life". Are these internecine formulas anything better than verbiage? Is there any doubleness of intellect finally left to the genius any more than to any one else? Well, the end of a "Critical Chat" is not the place to sum up the philosophy of Schopenhauer. Let me conclude by quoting the sentence which follows on that last quoted—a sentence in which many readers will agree with him: "And what specially characterises genius is that it has none of that sobriety of temper which is always to be found in the ordinary simple intellect, be it acute or dull". But there is genius and genius; and Schopenhauer does not typify all, though he plainly thought he did.

## HEINE'S BLIND SPOT.

(1895.)

THE news that Mascagni has produced an opera on the basis of Heine's tragedy 'William Ratcliff' must have set some of Heine's readers wondering at the power of a classic reputation to keep alive, in a fashion, work which if signed by an unimportant name would have struck anyone who came across it in after times as dead past all resurrection. Nowhere in the world, perhaps, is the business of galvanising literary mummies so zealously pursued as in Germany ; and in no department do the Germans carry it further than in their drama. In France, the *Théâtre Français* plays the French classics because it is in part subventioned for that purpose, and because the French dramatic classics are in a way permanently playable as well as readable. But in Germany, although there are plenty of subventions for the theatres, it needs no subvention to get together an audience for anything by Schiller, or Goethe, or Lessing. The large-hearted Teuton will joyously sit through the whole of the *Wallenstein* cycle, including the Prologue ; or *Nathan the Wise*, or the most frigid comedy of Goethe (this, however, not quite so often), or anything whatever by Schiller ; even as he will ecstatically endure the whole *Nibelungen* epic at the hands of Wagner ; and he will play his way straight through Shakspere with as cheerful

a sense of doing his duty as carries the conscientious Briton once in a while to see a new Hamlet, or a new spectacle-setting of one of the history plays, with or without Irving in the central character. And though it took Teutonia a long time to love Heine, it would seem as if he too had now reached that "cruel immortality" which does not "consume", inasmuch as it preserves alike his worst and his best for adoration.

These considerations may or may not account for Mascagni's selection of 'William Ratcliff' as a theme for an opera. Perhaps the Germano-Italian alliance is an integral part of the explanation. But whatever may have been the motive, it is certain that no worse basis for a tragic opera could well be selected in these days than Heine's youthful work; because, broadly speaking, Heine had no capacity for presenting real character in credible dramatic action, and because, narrowly speaking, this particular composition might successfully be played as a burlesque without the least alteration in the plot or dialogue. It would need only that what is essentially burlesque material should be handled by burlesque actors. Whether Heine himself felt this is a question which may be left to Heine-lovers to answer, each for himself. It is difficult to believe that the author of *Atta Troll* could ever be absurd without the least intention, or the least perception of the fact. But if 'William Ratcliff' was secretly planned as a burlesque the secret has been profoundly well kept.

In the preface to his collected 'English Fragments', which were originally contributed to the *Allgemeinen politischen Annalen*, Heine expresses the opinion that true poets have a wonderful intuition which enables them to dispense with the study of the things they describe. Willibald Alexis, he considers, had by virtue of such intuition given a close and accurate picture of English life in his *Die ehrlichen Leute*, without ever having visited England ; though on the other hand the poet admits that many romantic novelists of his nation had attempted similar pictures without success. And Heine considers that in his own tragedy 'William Ratcliff', written about the age of 22,\* he had not only given a true picture of England, but in part anticipated his later observations on its life, of which he had yet seen nothing. It is probably needless to discuss whether the "intuitions" of poets are any less inductions than other people's ; and perhaps equally needless to say that the tragedy of Heine's *Sturm und Drang* period has not quite the value he attributes to it as a rendering of English life in particular, giving as it does no very happy suggestion of life of any kind. In point of fact, the life it professes to deal

\* In this preface, dated November, 1830, he says the tragedy was written eleven years before ; in his collected works the title-page bears the date January, 1822 ; and in the preface he put to it in 1851 he says he wrote it in January, 1821. He may thus have written it at 20, at 22, or at 23. Two sets of presentation verses prefixed are dated 1823 and 1826.

with is Scotch. William Ratcliff is a highwayman of the fashion of Schiller's 'Robbers', who, as we gather from one of his soliloquies, had defied the population and the laws of Great Britain as a whole. The son of Sir Edward Ratcliff, he had studied at Edinburgh; and being rejected in the course of a college holiday by Maria, daughter of the noble Highland laird MacGregor, he had tried dissipation in London, but to no purpose. "Port-wine, champagne—all was without effect," as he tells us in blank verse; and, having squandered his fortune, he has turned highwayman, being of opinion that the world is badly arranged. Highway robbery, however, is with him only a subsidiary pursuit. From his childhood he has been in the habit of seeing two ghostly figures, a man and a woman, who are always striving in vain to embrace; and Maria is the woman and he the man. Supernatural powers are thus concerned in his career; and he has consequently felt impelled to kill in succession, in fair duel, at a certain Black Stone near MacGregor's castle, Philip Macdonald, Earl of Ais, and the Lord Duncan, a descendant of the Scottish kings, who had in turn been engaged to the doomed Maria. When the play opens, Maria is once more engaged, this time to one Count Douglas, who does not happen to have heard of these trivial local incidents. Douglas relates to Maria and MacGregor an adventure he has had in a wood near Inverness. He has been attacked by three robbers, and would have been

In the preface to his collected 'English Fragments', which were originally contributed to the *Allgemeinen politischen Annalen*, Heine expresses the opinion that true poets have a wonderful intuition which enables them to dispense with the study of the things they describe. Willibald Alexis, he considers, had by virtue of such intuition given a close and accurate picture of English life in his *Die ehrlichen Leute*, without ever having visited England; though on the other hand the poet admits that many romantic novelists of his nation had attempted similar pictures without success. And Heine considers that in his own tragedy 'William Ratcliff', written about the age of 22,\* he had not only given a true picture of England, but in part anticipated his later observations on its life, of which he had yet seen nothing. It is probably needless to discuss whether the "intuitions" of poets are any less inductions than other people's; and perhaps equally needless to say that the tragedy of Heine's *Sturm und Drang* period has not quite the value he attributes to it as a rendering of English life in particular, giving as it does no very happy suggestion of life of any kind. In point of fact, the life it professes to deal

\* In this preface, dated November, 1830, he says the tragedy was written eleven years before; in his collected works the title-page bears the date January, 1822; and in the preface he put to it in 1851 he says he wrote it in January, 1821. He may thus have written it at 20, at 22, or at 23. Two sets of presentation verses prefixed are dated 1823 and 1826.

with is Scotch. William Ratcliff is a highwayman of the fashion of Schiller's 'Robbers', who, as we gather from one of his soliloquies, had defied the population and the laws of Great Britain as a whole. The son of Sir Edward Ratcliff, he had studied at Edinburgh; and being rejected in the course of a college holiday by Maria, daughter of the noble Highland laird MacGregor, he had tried dissipation in London, but to no purpose. "Port-wine, champagne—all was without effect," as he tells us in blank verse; and, having squandered his fortune, he has turned highwayman, being of opinion that the world is badly arranged. Highway robbery, however, is with him only a subsidiary pursuit. From his childhood he has been in the habit of seeing two ghostly figures, a man and a woman, who are always striving in vain to embrace; and Maria is the woman and he the man. Supernatural powers are thus concerned in his career; and he has consequently felt impelled to kill in succession, in fair duel, at a certain Black Stone near MacGregor's castle, Philip Macdonald, Earl of Ais, and the Lord Duncan, a descendant of the Scottish kings, who had in turn been engaged to the doomed Maria. When the play opens, Maria is once more engaged, this time to one Count Douglas, who does not happen to have heard of these trivial local incidents. Douglas relates to Maria and MacGregor an adventure he has had in a wood near Inverness. He has been attacked by three robbers, and would have been

killed but for the timely help of a stranger, who would not wait to be thanked. In the course of the narrative Maria faints, and the laird feels compelled next day to explain the circumstance to her lover by communicating the story of Ratcliff's dealings with Maria's intended husbands. On this Douglas soliloquially intimates that he feels he has been overreached, and that he and Maria have little love for each other. Then he accepts an invitation to repair to the Black Stone, where he finds that the man who saved his life is Ratcliff, now thirsting for his blood. They fight, and the ghosts of Macdonald and Duncan aid Douglas, so that Ratcliff falls, justly observing that three to one is too many. But he is not killed, and after soliloquising he resolves to proceed to MacGregor's castle, partly from force of habit, it having been his practice to appear to Maria at midnight and present her with the ring of betrothal, cut from the hand of the victim. Just about this time a crazy nurse, who is given to singing the ballad refrain :

"Why does your brand sae drop wi' bluid,  
Edward, Edward?"

has been telling Maria for the first time how her (Maria's) mother, known as Fair (or Bonny) Betty, had in youth been engaged to Edward Ratcliff, William's father. Betty had had a voice which, when she sang

"Why does your brand sae drop wi' bluid,  
Edward, Edward?"

caused the cooks to let the roasts burn ; and on one occasion, when she had sung that particular and favorite line, Edward entered the room singing by way of context a couplet which is not in the original :

"I have stricken my darling dead—  
My darling was so fair, O!"

Thereupon Betty renounced him, and married MacGregor ; Edward promptly taking revenge by marrying "Lord Campbell's Jenny". Not for a year did Betty mention his name ; but it then occurred to her to inquire concerning him, and on the nurse mentioning the union with Lord Campbell's Jenny as the last incident of importance in his history, Betty burst into tears, in which nurse and baby joined. But the further assurance that Edward was still madly devoted to his first love restored Betty's spirits, and prospects of a scandal opened up, only to be nipped in the bud by the slaughter of Edward under the castle walls by MacGregor.

Just as Maria has mastered these details William enters, wounded. Her first and natural impulse is to ask if he has brought her Douglas's ring ; but from this point she becomes confused, and proposes, in the capacity of Bonny Betty, to bind up his wounds, as being those of Edward. The complicated situation thus created is solved by William's killing first Maria and then her father, who comes to the rescue, himself finally dying by

Maria's side ; and the two ghostly figures which have come on the scene at intervals now succeed in embracing ; whereafter the demented nurse cheerfully informs the assembled company that the dead young couple closely resemble Edward and the beautiful Betty. Such is the tragedy of ' William Ratcliff ', written by Heine in three days in 1821. The oddest thing of all is that he reprinted it in 1851 with a preface in which, alluding to it as the closing product of his *Sturm und Drang* period, he treats it with perfect seriousness as the beginning of a fashion in tragedy, and shows no sense whatever of its intense absurdity. What he can have been thinking of when, in 1830, he claimed for it the merit of an intuitional representation of English life, it is not easy to imagine. The scenes are laid somewhere about Inverness, and the local color is of the queerest. Douglas addresses laird MacGregor as " my lord " ; and Ratcliff's robber gang, which apparently does business in the Highlands, includes such names as Tom, Dick, Bill, Robin, and Taddie. Tom, the innkeeper, teaches his son the Lord's prayer, and Robin twice says " Goddam ". The period is indicated as very recent (*neuesten Zeit*), and while the action, to have the faintest air of possibility, could be placed only in the time of the Stuarts, the references to London life belong to the present century. The chances are that it was on these the poet founded his claim to have portrayed English society, and there is accordingly nothing for it but to translate,

as faithfully as may be, the leading passage in that connection.

"**MARIA.**

"I pray you, Douglas, tell me something new.  
How goes the world in London? Here in Scotland  
We hear of nothing.

"**DOUGLAS.**

"Still the old pursuits.  
Men run and ride and search from street to street,  
Sleep through the day and turn to day the night.  
Vauxhall and routs and picnics have their crowds:  
And Drury Lane and Covent Garden charm.  
The opera bustles. Poundnotes are exchanged  
For notes of music. Loud 'God save the King'  
Is bellowed. Patriotic souls convene  
In gloomy cellars and politicise,  
Make up subscriptions, wager, swear, and yawn,  
And drink the welfare of the Fatherland.  
Roast beef and pudding smoke, the porter foams,  
And his receipt the quack smilingly writes.  
Still the pickpockets jostle; sharpers bore  
With their civilities. The beggar bores  
With miserable countenance and whimper.  
But worst of all bores is the tyrant fashion,  
The tight wasp-waisted coat, the collar stiff,  
And Babylonian chimney-pot-like hat."

Unoriginal as it is, the sketch has just enough of the future Heine, modern of the moderns, to heighten tenfold the absurdity of the play into which it is thrust. The intense incompatibility of the wine of Heine's satire, even at its poorest and surest, with the old bottle of the German romantic drama, is not the least grotesque feature of the piece. The one serious reflection that can arise in the matter is the perception of Heine's essential incapacity for drama, or for real human portrai-

ture in any form. His exquisite, impish mockery, and his no less exquisite and unhuman pathos, are gifts far removed from that "criticism of life by the representation of it" which is the business of drama as of fiction. Of course 'William Ratcliff' was a very juvenile work; and of course the drama in general is far enough from rising to the ideal. But there is no escaping the conclusion that Heine was without natural gift for the presentation of real human nature in action. That would seem to have been his blind spot. And the puzzle is, how the composer who made the music for *Cavalleria Rusticana* should fail to see as much.

## HEINRICH VON KLEIST.

(1888.)

It was a rather unlucky notion on the part of Messrs. Lloyd and Newton to give the title 'Prussia's Representative Man' \* to the volume in which they connected a biographical sketch of Heinrich von Kleist, and a translation of two of his works, with a historicoo-philosophical treatise, and appendices of the same order. The treatise is really very freshly and vigorously written, abounding in forcible sayings and independent views ; but it does not naturally and obviously connect with a study of Kleist ; and in any case the British reading public were extremely ill-prepared to see 'Prussia's Representative Man' in a writer of whom for the most part they had never heard. Hence, I believe, a comparative failure of the book, despite its all-round interest ; no trace of its influence being anywhere observable. At this moment, though Kleist is unquestionably one of the choicest German classics, his name is not to be found either in the 'Encyclopædia Britannica' or in 'Chambers' Encyclopædia' ; and I do not recollect to have ever seen any but an incidental reference to him in any English

\* 'Prussia's Representative Man.' By Francis Lloyd (of the Universities of Halle and Athens), and William Newton, F.R.G.S. London. Trübner and Co., 1875.

writer. "That true poetic genius," Mr. Ward called him, in his *History of English Dramatic Literature*. But, broadly speaking, one never sees or hears him mentioned in this country, Messrs. Lloyd and Newton's book having had, as aforesaid, apparently no vogue. And there being a great deal in titles, Shakspere notwithstanding, one surmises that the title of this volume may have made it miss the public who might appreciate it, while bringing it under the notice of unsophisticated readers who, looking for something about Bismarck, would be much bewildered by what they got.

There is, of course, one pretext for calling Kleist 'Prussia's Representative Man' — the fact, namely, that at the period at which Prussia began to recover herself and develop new character after the knock-down blow of Napoleon, Kleist was the most notably original of German writers. But that pretext is hardly sufficient. To be representative of a nation, if such a thing be conceivable at all, a man must exemplify in himself some of its main traits of temper, as Voltaire may be said to do in the case of France, and . . . but it is very hard indeed to find any more cases. In what sense does Shakspere represent England, or Dante Italy? About as obviously as Heinrich von Kleist does Prussia. As Messrs Lloyd and Newton's own biographical sketch shows, his was an abnormal nature, his genius resting on a high-strung, ill-balanced temperament: he lived

strenuously but restlessly, only after much searching finding his vocation ; and he ended his life by suicide, under very singular circumstances. Now, at one time—indeed in Kleist's own generation—it was common to look upon and speak of Germany as a sort of Hamlet among the nations, the German mind as of a Hamletic or Wertherian cast. Goethe and Richter both speak so at times; but I do not remember that this was ever held to be peculiarly true of Prussia in particular ; and certainly Prussian history since Kleist's day has not been Kleist-like, Hamlet-like, or Werther-like.

Let us take the outline of Kleist's life. Born in 1777,† at Frankfurt on the Oder, son of a Prussian officer, he was at first educated at home under a tutor ; but about 1787 he seems to have gone to Berlin, where he had the rest of his schooling in the house of a Lutheran pastor. His father died in 1788 and his mother in 1793 ; and in 1792, in his fifteenth year, Heinrich entered the Potsdam Guards, joining in the Rhine campaign of the following year.\* In 1799, now second

† Messrs. Lloyd and Newton's sketch, following that of Julian Schmidt and many other writers, gives the date as 1776 ; but Eduard Grisebach, in the *Chronologische Uebersicht* given with the Reclam edition of Kleist's works, prints the officially certified entry in the Church register, which shows it to be 18th October, 1777. Kleist himself thought it was the 10th.

\* All the dates of the earlier biographers seem to be untrustworthy : Messrs. Lloyd and Newton make Kleist enter the army in 1795.

lieutenant, he left the army, and entered the university of his native town as student of philosophy, mathematics, and "cameralia" or financial science; a change of life peculiarly noteworthy in Germany, where the principle of routine and regular training in all things is so solidly established. At Frankfort he had the society of his sister and her friends; and he set himself not only to make good his own education but to improve theirs, the training of German women in those days being even more backward than that of women elsewhere. But his temperamental weaknesses were apparent at this as at other stages of his career. As a boy he had been waywardly studious; as a student, teaching women, he was moved to give up his prelections for weeks because one of his auditors once left her seat and ran to a window to see a procession. Women, however, always interested him. Like most of his species, he had in his teens a love affair which came to nothing; and at Frankfort he was soon betrothed to an eligible young lady, to whom he showed himself "exceedingly jealous and exacting". "His letters to his betrothed at this time," say Messrs. Lloyd and Newton, "are curiosities. They are more like the monitions of a pedagogue than the effusions of a lover. He seemed quite to forget that he was addressing a woman, and treated her rather as a grind-stone whereon to sharpen his new-found faculties than as the confidante of unrestrained feeling."

This is, I think, exaggerated: Kleist could at times make love like another; but it points with some truth to the strenuous cast of mind which made him, while still young, a great writer. In 1800 he entered the Finance Department at Berlin; but he soon discovered, in the society of his equals in culture, that this could not be his vocation any more than the army. Henceforward he lived restlessly, travelling much, staying for spells in different places and working intensely at his literary creations, taking a keen interest in the European situation, and doing his part to stimulate national sentiment. His engagement was broken off, but the lovers met again after some years and became good friends—a result probably dependent on their not marrying. In 1807 he had the curious hap to be arrested by the French authorities on suspicion of being an intending insurrectionist, and was actually imprisoned for about seven months. On his release he took to letters with new avidity, combining journalism with playwriting, and diversifying both with a new love affair, “the unfortunate termination of which was owing solely to his whimsical obstinacy,” but over which he unsuccessfully attempted to poison himself with opium. His life continued restless, shifting, ill-ordered, hypochondriacal, strenuous, till the end, which came very early. At Berlin he had become acquainted with Madame Henrietta Vogel, “a lady of great gifts, but, like the poet, a prey to hypochondria,” which in her

case was solidly founded on an incurable disease. The strange story of their relation is told by Messrs. Lloyd and Newton *verbatim* from Schmidt. The two unfortunates were not at first at all disposed to fall in love, but they were both devoted to music, and their hypochondria made a very valid tie between them. One day, in a scene of what I would call German sentiment, she got him to promise to put an end to her sufferings by killing her ; and on 20th November, 1811, the two, at a country place near Potsdam, actually died together by Kleist's hand ; she first opening her dress to be shot through the breast, whereafter he shot himself through the head. They were found lying in a dell together, both faces wearing "a happy, tranquil expression".

Here, evidently, genius merged into madness ; Kleist being indeed one of the most notable cases in literature of the flowering of high intellective energy in a diseased soil. No German in *re* time wrote, at least in drama, with such power and truth : his works are to this day unique, *anticipating* as they did by two generations the present-day movement of naturalism, though adhering to the classic dramatic forms. "In them alone, of all German works," say his English translators, "do we find what is really typical and spontaneous ; for his genius, true and fervid, freed him from the imitative methods that were conventional at the time, and encouraged him to seek inspiration in the history of his own kin and

country." This is, I think, substantially true, under certain obvious reservations ; and it is only to be regretted that Messrs. Lloyd and Newton did not translate more than two of Kleist's works by way of proving their point. They have chosen the prose story of *Michael Kohlhaas*, a narrative founded on a historic fact, preserved in an old chronicle, and displaying a rare power of sympathetic and creative imagination ; and the blank verse drama 'Prince Frederick of Homburg', which they consider Kleist's most perfect work. I do not agree with this judgment, though the play is one of the strongest of its kind in any literature. To my mind it suffers somewhat from the insanity of motive which was bequeathed to modern drama from that of the Renaissance (by way of Shakspere), and from the infusion of would-be Shakspereanism of style, which even Kleist could not quite escape. Modern Shakspereanism is bad enough in English, but it is worse in German. I at least get a much more rounded satisfaction from the verse-comedy *Der Zerbrochene Krug*—'The Broken Jug'—which is a perfect masterpiece of realistic character-drama, unmatched in Europe to this day. Here Kleist is absolutely himself, despite the verse-form. But it would be unjust to overlook the power with which he manages dramatic utterance and dialogue in serious poetic drama. In his hands the sluggish German speech bounds and explodes with life, giving the reader

that rare sensation of vibrating force, of the throb of the living blood, that is the supreme quality of the work of Shakspere ; and to his countrymen he is alike great in his nationalistic *Hermann-schlacht* (which is responsible for not a little of later Teutonic spread-eagleism) and in his realistic character-painting. It is difficult to understand how he has remained so long virtually unknown in England.

The work of translation has been done by Messrs. Lloyd and Newton on the whole very satisfactorily. In rendering the blank verse they take more liberties than the conscientious bookman can approve ; but the chances are that the translation rather gains in vivacity than loses on that account ; and of *Michael Kohlhaas* they give a free but good idiomatic version. It occurs to me only to object that the word “*ferocious*”, in the second sentence, is not a good rendering of *entsetzlichsten* ; the idea being that Kohlhaas was “at once one of the most right-meaning and of the most *dreaded* men of his time”.

A word ought to be added on the merit of the historic chapter above alluded to. It is plainly the performance of a man of original thinking power, endowed with some, if not with all, of the gifts which make an influential writer. It at times presents a half truth as if it were the whole --a tendency which is apt, as in the reference to Christianity and materialism at the close of the appendix, to put the writer wrong with rationalist

readers—but it would not be easy to find an essay of the kind which in the same space presents so much really fresh and stimulating thinking. One often dissents ; but at least as often one is captured. In the way of pithy and sound generalisation it would not be easy to beat some passages, such as these : “ The prig, male or female, is the same in all times and in all countries, *obeying not his own needs, but the needs of others which he believes ought to be his.*” “ Priggishness, however, if not true in itself, may yet be valuable in a secondary sense, as helping to develop art. . . . Priggishness, the vice of imitation, is in fact the egg-shell which the sturdy bird can break, but in which the weak perishes.” “ Literary and art criticism have hitherto been purely metaphysical : that is to say, certain entities have been formed, considered inexplicable, and treated as forces.” “ High art is the expression of a longing for great joys ; low art for joys of a meaner kind ; and both are requisite for the full nature of man.” Such phrases add to the stimulation of an essay which has abundant interest in its thesis and argumentation, apart from its style. In fine, the English reader has here a very inviting opportunity of being introduced in part to a German dramatist whom not to know is to be ignorant of a European classic.

## MR. GLADSTONE AND THE POETS.

### I.

THE most striking thing about Mr. Gladstone's brief review\* of the poetry of the century is the combined catholicity and freshness of his interest in a subject which few statesmen find leisure and zeal for, and which nobody but himself could keep so vividly in remembrance along with such masses of wholly different matter. When all is said of him, Mr. Gladstone remains a great physiological phenomenon. Here we have him, on a moment's call, reviving a series of literary impressions as copious and as keen as those of most professional literary men, unchilled by his eighty winters, undulled by the friction of the innumerable problems of affairs with which he has been grappling from his youth up. And he would be a shallow critic who made light of the value of the statesman's retrospect of the poetry of his age. There could hardly be a better index to the present position of the poetry of the earlier part of the century than the impression they finally leave with a highly-cultured man of affairs, who has through a long life been fully in touch with the movement of his age, and who has himself been developing with it

\* In the *Speaker*, January, 1890.

to the last. Even on the matters on which he has moved least—for instance his theology—a recent utterance has shown that his thinking processes have never become mechanical, that he is at this moment perhaps the most flexible of those who in general think on his lines. And his review of the century's poetry, with its cordial notice of the sternly and paganly stoic song of Emily Brontë, and of the unflinchingly anti-theistic verse of Constance Naden, shows that the blight of conservatism has touched him as little in his love of letters as in his politics. And, hastily as the article in the *Speaker* must have been produced (for only great haste could have caused the omission of the name of Matthew Arnold when habitual fairness to enemies secured the mention of Mr. Swinburne), it really has a value in itself as a survey of the position of English poetry past and present. Perhaps on one point Mr. Gladstone has adhered to convention. It is probably no longer true for thinking men that "the office of the poet is the most creative of all human functions." If that title be awarded at all to an artist as distinguished from all other activities, it would now be given by more votes to music than to poetry; but indeed that kind of judgment is grown a little old-fashioned. On the other hand, however, it is certainly true, as Mr. Gladstone contends, that the poetry of a nation is a test of its vigor and promise—true, that is, the word being taken in its wide German sense, as overing fiction.

tion and the drama. Taken in our stricter sense, it might prove too much.

The point of Mr. Gladstone's article as a whole is that, while English poetry in general is an immense body of great art, and the poetry of the early part of this century was a new triumph, that of the later period is on the whole a worthy addition to the mass. If there is any touch of conservatism in the article, it is in respect of the hesitation to say whether the later work can be put on a level with the earlier. A good many critics not given to overpraising the present would be likely to decide that Tennyson and Browning and Arnold will quite hold their own against Wordsworth and Shelley and Byron, and even Coleridge, while, as Mr. Gladstone ~~indeed~~ admits, the mass of good minor poetry to-day is greater than it was in the Wordsworthian dulled <sup>literature</sup>. Mr. Gladstone very well points out in ~~of affair~~ <sup>his youth</sup> the remarkable number of women poets whose work quite transcends the ~~who made~~ performance of Mrs. Hemans. It is ~~to~~ <sup>the</sup> prospect to say that George Eliot's poetic light hardly be George Eliot's verse would have been of the poetic performance in respect not merely the imprint of its technique in the first quarter cultured <sup>ly</sup>. And at this moment the number life been ~~to~~ <sup>to</sup> turn out really excellent verse—age, and could have made them famous fifty ~~s~~ remarkable. Within just the last such lyric work as has been done by

that ill-fated Constance Naden, of whom Mr. Gladstone speaks ; by Mathilde Blind, by "E. Nesbit", by "Michael Field", and many more—this, taken with work of older standing, such as the best of Mrs. Pfeiffer and Mrs. Augusta Webster, goes far to prove the faculty of women in poetry as decisively as it had already been proved in fiction, or as it is being simultaneously proved in painting. And this remarkable progress of women in poetry is certainly a most important promise for the future of the nation ; because if our women are advancing, the nation cannot well go back. But yet there are some countervailing considerations, which can hardly be overlooked in a reflective reading of Mr. Gladstone's article, though they might well be overlooked by ~~as sometimes~~ his point of view, or indeed might ~~of~~ land by the ~~ea~~ illusions.

As there was before

In particular we have to note ~~ference~~ of opinion among us of what the Ger, but after his letter *Dichtung*, but we specify as here will assuredly be Mr. Gladstone would probably general rule Scotsmen in the last twenty years we ~~hg~~ much as to whether in the former ; and probably after ; indeed they might maintain that we had developed ~~tained~~ the attitude urged latter. Now, these must be the, who told them that truly tests of national vigour whether he or Schiller were it is not easy to understand it to be thankful they had all right if in these respects. But between Mr. hind. The case of France. There, at the moment, 1890.

tivated, yet it will hardly be suggested that France is at this moment less vigorous than she was when De Musset and Hugo were producing their best verse. Her novelists more than make up in power for the decline of poetry; though her drama, again, is certainly not at present progressing *pari passu* with her prose literature in general. Tried by the literature test, Germany would come off worst of the three, since she has at the moment neither great poets, great dramatists,\* nor great novelists—nay, not even great philosophers nor, if we except the aged Brahms, musicians of the order in which she was formerly so fecund.† After all, the progress of our women is the most promising feature in our own case; and it is one not yet

even able as could be wished in France, while  
adm. coh g. its, ent in Germany. In these circum-  
litera. reate<sup>d</sup> to take care not to make too  
dulled by Mr. Ettry. Good poetry written by  
of affairs he re<sup>t</sup> they are advancing relatively  
his youth ears women of other countries ; but  
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hardly be a Georg<sup>n</sup> poets, good as so much  
of the poetry g perfe<sup>s</sup> not set up the conviction  
the impressio<sup>n</sup> of it ahead of the movement of  
cultured many. An<sup>g</sup>eral relation to life. An  
life been fully ho turn<sup>d</sup> the decisive advent of Haupt-  
age, and wh<sup>o</sup>uld h<sup>o</sup> s remain before the rise of Richard  
\* In <sup>ich</sup> lyi

*Mr. Gladstone and the Poets.*

English Walt Whitman, with something of originality and force of the republican poet inspiring a finer art, would not be at all superfluous at present. He would of course be stoned hooted at the outset ; but that, let us hope, will not last long. For the mere appearance of a poet would serve to bring out the fact that Wordsworth and Shelley and Coleridge are from overwhelming the modern intelligence their criticism of life, and that even the subsequent achievement of Arnold and Browning and Tennyson, great as it is, has not outrun the thought of the age.

II.

MR. GLADSTONE, it is to be feared, has something to answer for in having set Scotland by the ear over Scott and Burns. Perhaps there was before as he remarks, " much difference of opinion among Scots on the subject, but after his letter to Mr. Brown the hatter, there will assuredly be a great deal more. As a general rule Scotsmen get along without worrying much as to whether Burns or Scott is the greater ; indeed they might almost be said to have attained the attitude urged on the Germans by Goethe, who told them that instead of discussing whether he or Schiller were the better poet they ought to be thankful they had two such fellows at once. But between Mr.

Gladstone and Mr. Brown the hatter, that state of Arcadian peace is now gone, if not for ever, probably for long. As a strain on personal relations, the new problem threatens to leave in the rear Disestablishment and the burgessex-ship of Mr. Parnell. Nay, men who could agree on both of these thorny questions are found divided over Scott and Burns ; and despondent Toryism is said to be visibly galvanised by the hope of a new split in the Liberal party. Men who have hitherto lived fraternally in a sound if latitudinarian Gladstonianism are become conscious of a stiffness in their relations, and do not very well see how it is going to end. Some people blame Mr. Gladstone, but for our part, speaking without any thought of party allegiance, we distinctly think the fault lies with Mr. Brown the hatter. It was he who, after the praise of Scott in the Dundee speech, wrote to Mr. Gladstone to contend that Burns was "the more lofty, national, and true genius, and so by consequence the national author or bard of Scotland ". That was what put all the fat in the fire, and now we are facing the usual mysteriously irrelevant consequences.

Is it yet too late for an impartial Press to play the part of the landlord of the Rainbow and assure the rival parties headed by Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Brown the hatter that they are both right and both wrong? For each one of their individual propositions there is plenty to be said, and still the question is not to be settled in the way that

either side proposes. If by calling Burns the more "lofty" genius you mean to indicate that he had a more disinterested and spontaneous passion for literature than Scott, why, it is not easy to dispute that in the face of Scott's deliberate devotion to the task of making a fortune and setting up a county family. If by "the more national" you mean that Burns is more strictly limited to Scotland and has less universal interest for men and women, again there cannot well be any dispute; but is that so very much to Burns's glory? He is peculiarly Scotch for one thing, because all his best work is in the Scots vernacular, which is very difficult to translate, and because his themes are mostly Scotch. But if Burns had, as Carlyle puts it, got to a university, he might conceivably have changed the course of British literature; and in that case he would be much less peculiarly Scotch. Shall we then say that his merit depends on the limits of his culture? That would be to deny that he was at bottom an essentially great man. And this is really the tendency of that kind of eulogy which makes it a supreme merit in a poet to be "national". The greatest poets are cosmopolitan. In a sense you may call Shakspere the national poet of England, because he is the greatest of English poets; but what is there specially in common between Shakspere and the average type of Englishman? As little as between Dante and the average Italian. These are poets not for one country, or one period; and

to imply that Burns is something less is queer eulogy. To make it a special merit in turn that he is restricted chiefly to Scotland by reason of his having written in the now non-literary dialect of the Lowlands, is to glory inconsiderately in what is really an unfortunate limit to his fame.

But when it is insisted that Burns is the "truer" genius of the two, we are clearly in the neighbourhood of vagueness. What is meant by "true" in this connection? It is undeniable that Scott has done a great deal of conventional work, in which he weakly follows the standards of the effete fiction of previous times, and fails to exhibit his own observation and his own faculty. But Burns too did conventional work. His English versification is indeed so generally commonplace as even to raise the doubt whether he would not have been lost to "true" poetry if he had received a college training. Not always does he listen to his best inspiration; and in Scotland it is as a rule the more uncritical people who hold that his 'Cottar's Saturday Night' has anything like the genius of his 'Jolly Beggars'. But just as Burns had his strong points and his masterpieces, so had Scott, as Mr. Gladstone reminds us when he speaks of the "grandeur and power" of the greater among the romances. Perhaps these terms are not the most generally fitting. Some of Scott's choicest successes lie in his pictures of rustic or comic Scotch character, his Cuddie Headriggs and Dandie Dinmonts and Bailie Nicol Jarvies. Seldom

even decisive to say that Burns is the more intense of the two at all times in his emotional realisation of human experience ; for Scott's art necessitated difference of expression ; and in any case, intensity of passion is not the only measure of greatness or inspiration. The question is, which sort of power is the rarer. The man who portrayed Rebecca and Diana and Jeanie Deans and the Master of Ravenswood and Alan Fairford and Louis XI had surely some grasp of human nature, some depth of science of the human heart. Many readers feel this with overwhelming force ; and when they remember all those personal virtues which went with the magical creative gift they are inclined not only to say with Professor Masson that Scott was one of the best men that ever lived —a better man than Burns—but that he had a far greater range of power than his ill-fated countryman. To which it is to be answered that the kind of dramatic and perceptive power shown in Burns' mere portrait-painting in verse is at least as rare as that shown in Scott's prose ; and that he had further a genius for language, for original and burning and felicitous speech, which Scott's warmest admirers admit him to have grievously lacked, and the absence of which makes Scott's influence on men so much less elemental, so much less stirring, than that of Burns. True, we must not decide that that man is the "truer genius" who shows most nervous excitation in his manner and in his life ; but neither must we allow ourselves

merely to give the palm to the "good" man, even if he contrives to make a fortune without coming to grief over his money-seeking speculations. Perhaps both kinds of bias operate in the dispute over Scott and Burns. When all is said, the dispute remains an unprofitable one; especially in so far as it is waged by those Burns-worshippers who know little of any other writers, Scott included, and are therefore the less fitted to appreciate properly their own idol. But even from the point of view of cosmopolitan criticism, the comparison sought to be set up between Burns and Scott is one which "does not let itself be made"; and if the two men had not been compatriots, no one would have thought of attempting it.

## THE JINGOISM OF POETS.

(1887.)

A PHENOMENON that in these days calls for scientific investigation is the Chauvinism of poets generally, and the intensification of the bias in them as they grow in years. To take the most prominent case, Lord Tennyson in his young days certainly wrote war songs enough ; but he was at one time, at least, capable of an occasional aspiration for peace and a frown at Bobadilism ; whereas in his latter years the one political sentiment to which he seems to be constant is that of the gloriousness of being nationally ready to fight on any pretext or none. But the Laureate is being adequately kept in countenance by his brethren of the lyre. Mr. Swinburne, who was once thought to be the laureate of democracy, and who was once very obviously a lover of France, seems to have settled down into a British fire-eater of the good old type that was always adjuring the shades of Blake and Nelson. In one of his late volumes there was an extraordinary attack on the French people, who were described as "French hounds, whose necks are aching still from the chain they crave ", in contrast to the glorious sons of Albion ; and now, in the prefatory poem he contributes to Mrs. Davenport Adams's newly published 'Sea Song and River Rhyme', the eminent Hugolator, in a

piece of decrepit declamation on the British navy, thinks fit to speak of "Smooth France as a serpent for rancor", coupling the Republic with "Dark Muscovy, girded with guile". It was only the other day, again, that Mr. George Meredith, novelist and poet, communicated to the *Pall Mall Gazette* a composition in verse on the subject of national defence, in which the bellicose passion gurgled out in clotted clauses of barely intelligible vaticination, recalling nothing so much as the choking gasps of an inverted water-bottle. "Ouida" is another authority who in recent years has essayed to blow the warlike trumpet apropos of some conjuncture in foreign politics; it being the tendency of the literary Chauvinist always to "drop into poetry" when the blood-thirsty fit comes on. Mr. Alfred Austin's name yet again suggests itself as that of a poetic patriot watchful of every opportunity for martial bombast; his being the alliterative art which in a poem on the Channel Tunnel scheme pictured its promoters as persons who,

"basely bold,  
Burrow beneath the bastions of the brine."

Altogether, it appears that we shall not speedily be reduced to a state of peace on earth and goodwill among men if the poets can help it.

When we look for an explanation of this zeal to foster a temper that so visibly needs no fostering, we seem to find the clue in the essential egoism of their utterance. Much has been said of

the fashion in which kings and statesmen, desiring to injure each other, send to their deaths by mutual slaughter millions who have no cause of quarrel ; but as the human conscience becomes a little better organised, must not some of the blame, or more of the same sort, be apportioned to those literary sentimentalists who, with such a fine consciousness of their heroism and patriotism, seek to lay on the shoulders of their fellows grievous burdens which they will not so much as touch with the tips of their fingers? Not one of the prating brotherhood will ever shed a drop of his blood, or even sleep the less soft for the sake of the country he is for ever hounding on to war or preparation for war. Frankly, one turns from their heroics and poetics—as one rejects tinsel and attitudinising for sterling sincerity—to that plain-spoken gospel of peace which Mr. Bright once again preaches to the generation to which he has preached on that text so often. The outcome, so far as there is any, of the raptures of the sentimentalists is neither more nor less than that grisly record of shameful war and execrable bloodshed which the old politician once again recites, with something of his old and noble passion against the senseless waste of life and happiness it implies. To this complexion the poets' Chauvinism comes, let them paint it an inch thick. And if we are to set any store by passion as passion, surely the passion for saving life has some dignity, as against the passion for destroying it. Mr. Arnold,

another martial poet, who sneers—in prose this time—at the statesmanship which drew back after Majuba Hill from a scruple about blood-guiltiness, has said some superior things about Mr. Bright in his time, and will doubtless smile at the old tribune's latest appeal as he smiles at the Peace Society. But let him smile who wins. If some of us are not deceived in our estimate of the tendencies of practical ethics, the day is not very distant when the war-fomenting apostle of sweetness and light, and his fellow-idealists in general, will rank amongst the least in the kingdom of humanity in respect of their action as citizens, however we may esteem their gifts; while the veteran who to the last hated war and denounced war-makers will earn the gratitude men give to the true lovers of their kind, however they might dispute as to some of his political doings.

There is, doubtless, to reverse Shakspere, something natural in this if philosophy could but find it out. There is assuredly some connection between the function of stirring the emotions in general by rhythmic methods and the tendency to give way to one of the most primitive of the emotions without either rhyme or reason. Poets, like actors and musicians, run certain risks of temperamental aberration, and there is nothing psychologically perplexing in the fact that they are found, with their habit of cultivating passion, specially liable to that form of elementary passion which, next to the sexual instinct, is most widely diffused through

organic nature. A very large part of their time is occupied in singing of love: it is almost inevitable that a large part more should be devoted to the celebration of instinctive hate. If they are accurate in saying that they "sing because they must, and pipe but as the linnets sing," they put us in a position to regard them biologically as in a sense so many "blind mouths" by which the main emotions of mankind tend to express themselves. And it is only fair to admit that, one passion being in the abstract equally good with another as an artistic motive, the outcome of belligerent ideation in the poetic organism may often prove to be verse that, as verse, is fully abreast of the best love poetry; though it cannot be pretended that the recent effusions of Lord Tennyson and Mr. Swinburne bear out such a view. But, however that may be, it is sufficiently clear to people of more normal temperament that it is not from professional emotionalists such as these that we can rationally look for right guidance in the great concerns of national life. Their very unanimity is suspicious. In a matter of domestic politics, Mr. Swinburne is found heaping contumely on the House of Lords on the occasion of the Laureate's accession to it; while the latter makes a return shot in an allusion to the suffrage of the plow. Each singer speaks in passion: what is likely to be the sum of their united wisdom when they coincide in passionately prescribing a passionate course? Decidedly the poet must be kept in his

place. It is he, not the "knowledge" he so vainly disparages, that plays the part of "some wild Pallas of the brain", and infuriates men to evil deeds, irremediable and unpardonable. The intuition he vaunts as the higher law is as often as not the mere sublimated instinct of the beast. It may or may not be desirable that, under any form of constitution, the philosophers should be kings ; but there is no doubt at all as to the wisdom of morally enthroning the poets. Their rule would give points to pandemonium.

## SOME PLAGIARISMS.

(1883.)

DR. JOHNSON at one time projected "a work to show how small a quantity of REAL FICTION there is in the world ; and that the same images, with very little variation, have served all the authors who have ever written." This was one of several well-considered schemes of the Doctor's—schemes which were never carried into execution, chiefly owing to that besetting indolence for which no one blamed him more frequently than himself. Whether he would have been able to make good his prospectus is a question which is perhaps worth discussing, and may one day be raised by some more indefatigable student than Dr. Johnson. We are fallen upon scientific times. Mr. Howells assures us that there are no new stories, the possibilities of fresh entertainment for the world in that direction being limited to the authors' fresh comments on the familiar situations ; and indeed somebody averred long ago that there were only some six and twenty plots in the whole range of drama. The prospect suggested by such dicta is a trifle dismal. It is not inspiriting to learn that the "unspent beauty of surprise" is dwindling ; and that our total hopes and fears may eventually be passed through a calculating machine and turned into algebra, as the mathematicians are threatening to do with the most tempting depart-

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ments of political economy. On the whole one prefers to trust to the resources of the kaleidoscope we call evolution. Still, if literature is to be systematically analysed and set forth in some sort of "anatomy of the vertebrates" and otherwise, there will be compensations. There will be some rare sensations while the fossil-hunting and classification are going on; ecstasies of discovery, and deep thrills of satisfaction on finding a hypothesis work. Who has not felt the titillation of the nerves that arises when some far-travelled phrase is traced back by scent to its proper home? To be sure, if one is content with barn-door game the sensation may be had as often as need be. But it is hardly worth while to indicate the intromissions of Gifted Hopkins with Byron, even for the entertainment of being confronted with the local newspaper's testimony to his originality. The true plagiarism-hunter only tastes satisfaction when he finds an eminent writer in possession of another man's phrase. Then he is jubilant, totally forgetting, it is to be feared, the occasions on which, in bitterness of soul, he has cried on his own account: "*pereant qui ante nos nostra dixerunt.*"

It is probable that many a good shot is missed all round. We are most of us blissfully short-sighted. When, for instance, the late Dr. Kencaly a few years ago convulsed the House of Commons by the statement that he shook off calumnies "as the lion shakes the dew-drops from

his mane", the great majority of his hearers and of the public were in doubt whether the phrase was original or a quotation. One erudite "London correspondent", after some days' reflection, suggested that it was to be found "in the works of Dr. Johnson";\* and it was not till some time later that a comparatively well-informed journalist expressed surprise that nobody should have known the phrase to be a quotation from 'Troilus and Cressida'. But even that journalist did not happen to remember that the expression was to be found quoted in such tolerably well-known works as the 'Antiquary', Carlyle's 'Heroes and Hero-Worship', ('The Hero as Poet: Burns'), and Carlyle's essay on 'Count Cagliostro'. Probably it will be found in half a dozen places more.

Some taking phrases we find repeated as often, with a poetic indifference to the ceremony of acknowledgment. One collocation of words can be traced from Chaucer, through Spenser and Fletcher, to Wordsworth.

Chaucer has—

"These little herd<sup>gromes</sup>  
That kepyn bestis in the bromes."

—'House of Fame,' B. III.

Then comes Spenser (whom Mr. Lowell charges with misapprehending Chaucer's rhythms) with—

"So loytring live you little heardgromes,  
Keeping your beastes in the budded broomes."

—'Shepherd's Calendar'—February.

\* It appears, in italics, in Johnson's preface to his edition of Shakspere—a little past the middle.

Fletcher, infected with the alliteration, speaks in his 'Faithful Shepherdess' (Act V), of—

"lazy clowns  
That feed their heifers in the budded broomes,"

making "grooms" rhyme in the next line. The phrase retaining its charm for two centuries, Wordsworth cannot resist speaking of—

"lasses and of shepherd grooms,  
That down the steep hills force their way"—

*horresco referens!*—

"Like cattle through the budded brooms."

—'White Doe of Rylstone,' c. 1.

Poe has splenetically remarked that "of the class of wilful plagiarists, nine out of ten are authors of established reputation, who plunder recondite, neglected, or forgotten books". He is humane enough to admit, however, that "imitators are not necessarily unoriginal, except at the exact points of imitation". The concession could not well have been withheld, for some of the most commanding names in literature, as everybody knows, stand in the list of habitual plagiarists. Taking our own literature, and setting aside the earlier poets who imitated the classics and Continental poets as a matter of course—setting aside also the origin of 'Paradise Lost', as well as the poet's innumerable reproductions from the classics and Dante—we find that Milton's "exact points of imitation" of his English predecessors are tolerably numerous. He borrowed frequently from Spenser, as anyone may satisfy himself who will,

after carefully re-perusing 'Paradise Lost', read the 'Faerie Queene' honestly from beginning to end, and keep a diary during the expedition. Of all great poets, Milton is the one who "conveys" with the most regal air. But it is significant that most of the appropriated passages are from the early cantos of Spenser's work. Milton, like the rest of us, probably found 'The Faerie Queene' "pleasant to read in, but hard to read through". It has often been pointed out that the sentiment about Virtue in 'Comus' is taken from the 12th stanza of Canto I, Book I; and that

"No Light, but rather darkness visible"

is suggested two stanzas further on, though it is, on the whole, more probable that Milton took his phrase from Seneca, or Euripides, or Sophocles. "Darkness visible" is nearer Seneca than Spenser. Then the forever impressive description of Sin is modelled on Spenser's 'Error'; and there is obviously a hereditary connection between Spenser's 'Dragon' (B. I, C. ii, st. 10) and Milton's 'Prince of Darkness', whether or not the conception of Satan was to any extent suggested by the Italian poet Marini, in his 'Sospetto d'Herode', translated by Crashaw. Probably, however, Spenser had borrowed in his turn. The Dragon's

"flaggy wings when forth he did display  
Were like two sayles;"

—[See Dante, 'Inferno', c. xxxiv., 44.]

the clouds

"fledd for terror great"

before him, and his tail

"sweepeth all the land behind him farre,  
And of three furlongs does but little lacke."

Milton's hero,

"Prone on the flood extended, long and large  
Lay floating many a rood;"

he, too, has "sail-broad vans" (Crashaw has "bosom'd sails"), and in his flying frightens Chaos, if not the clouds. The more dignified characteristics of the Miltonic demon are of course details in that process of refinement continued by Goethe and consummated by Heine. In Canto vii, Book I, of the 'Faerie Queene', stanza 13, will be found a highly abusive description of cannon, in which that "divelish yron Engin" is alleged to have been wrought "in deepest Hell and framed by Furies' skill". This is presumably the source of Milton's account in Book VI of 'Paradise Lost', though the scene of the invention is laid by him in the plains of heaven; not merely, it is to be hoped, in order to be able with greater plausibility to imitate Spenser in making heaven full of the noise. The blind poet's appropriation of Beaumont and Fletcher's "Hence all you vain delights" ('Nice Valor', Act III) in his "Hence, vain deluding joys", is as high-handed an act of plunder as any he committed.\* There is no end to his echoes of epithets, one example of which, the "voluminous and vast" in his de-

\* Southeby imitated the same song in his 'Lines written in the 16th Century' and 'Parodied in the 18th century'.

scription of Sin, strikes one rather oddly when one discovers that the phrase occurs in Ben Jonson's allusion to his own bulk in the lines, 'The Poet to the Painter'.

Many of Milton's own epithets, again, crop up in modern poetry. Campbell has the expression, "a horrid front" ('Downfall of Poland'), appropriated from 'Paradise Lost' (B. I). Coleridge has a "front sublime and broad" ('Destiny of Nations'), suggested by "fair large front and eye sublime";† and Mrs. Browning's "cedar alleys" in 'The Lost Bower' are found in 'Comus'. In regard to such echoes there is every reason to believe that they are generally unconscious, though they may sometimes, as Emerson puts it, "come of magnanimity and stoutness". Sometimes one recognises the reproduction of a cadence as distinguished from an expression, and here the imitation is in all likelihood unconscious. Mrs. Browning, for instance, probably would not have penned the lines—

"The great altar of St. Mary  
And the fifty tapers paling o'er it.  
\* \* \* \* \*

And the weary nuns with hearts that faintly  
Beat along their voices saintly,  
Ingemisco! Ingemisco!"

had she distinctly recollected that Coleridge, in 'Remorse', introduces a song with the passage:

"the Chaunters sad and saintly,  
Yellow tapers burning faintly,

† Keats has "fair large forehead".—'Hyperion,' B. I.

Doleful masses chaunt for thee  
Miserere Domine!"

Nor is it likely that she had the passage—

“the abhorred grate  
Marring the sunshine with its hideous shade,”

from Byron's ‘Lament of Tasso’, consciously in  
her mind when she wrote—

“Behind no prison gate, she said,  
Which slurs the sunshine half a mile.”  
—‘The Mask.’

One obvious echo, that of Mrs. Browning's “uncertain” curtain in Poe's ‘Raven’, has a special interest by reason of the practical puzzle presented in each picture. It is an interesting question where the curtain was in Bertram's room, and how Lady Geraldine happened to be behind it; but Poe's line presents a harder enigma, seeing that he makes it rustle constantly while both door and window are shut. He might have contended that when such ravens were about, abnormal phenomena were to be expected; but seeing that the unhappy poet was provoked to morbid anger by a question as to what cast the raven's shadow, it is to be feared he had simply been unthinkingly transgressing those rules of realism he laid down for his fellow-craftsmen. Of plagiarisms Poe was a ruthless detector; indeed his scent for them was morbid, leading him as it did, for instance, to make some overstrained charges against Lowell and Longfellow. But while the expression “hooded clouds” in ‘Midnight Mass for the

Dying Year' need not necessarily have been, as he contends, a copy of the exquisite touch—

“the grey-hooded Even  
Like a sad votaress in a palmer's weed”

in ‘Comus,’ the description of the “misty mountains” as “like hooded friars”, in ‘The Spanish Student’ (Act III, sc. vi.) is probably such an imitation; while

“the cowled and dusky-sandaled Eve  
In mourning weeds,”

found in ‘The Spirit of Poetry’, is certainly so, though, as it happened, Poe did not lay his finger on these. Longfellow seems to have been as fond of the conceit as he was of making “elysian” rhyme with “vision”.

There is probably no poet who has not imitated, consciously or unconsciously. Mr. Tennyson has lately been tracked through three literatures by a lynx-eyed student, and one often finds him borrowing in our own. The wind in the wood, sounding “Follow, follow,” in ‘The Princess,’ rose in ‘Prometheus Unbound’. The Laureate has “long glories of the winter moon”, and Dryden “long glories of majestic Rome”. “Hooked hands,” in the fragment ‘The Eagle’, may be from Ben Jonson’s masque ‘Love Freed from Folly’, though probably both poets imitated some classic; and perhaps the life-sick Lancelot’s

“forgotten mere  
Among the tumbled fragments of the hills,”

may be a memory of Scott's description of the scenery about Loch Katrine:

"Crags, knolls, and mounds confusedly hurled;  
The fragments of an earlier world."

Shelley, in 'The Cenci', copies Shakspere again and again:

"All good shall droop and sicken,"  
(Act IV, Sc. i) proceeds upon 'Macbeth'; and  
"the wind  
That enters whistling as in scorn,"

is from 'Romeo and Juliet'. In the next scene, again, we have—

"as universal as the light,  
Free as the earth-surrounding air; as firm  
As the world's centre;"

which is obviously from 'Macbeth'; another passage whereof, the murderer's cry concerning sleep, is imitated in the first scene of Shelley's fifth act; while, a few lines further on, Giacomo and Orsini talk as did King John and Hubert.

It is hardly necessary to say that the poets are not the only imitators. To go to one of the most original of modern writers, it will be found that Carlyle's reflections, in his early essay entitled 'Characteristics', on the advantage of having "no system" and being self-unconscious, are closely parallel to two passages from Hazlitt, though the idea is probably a great deal older than that writer.\* In his essay 'On Prejudice' is the

\* Keats in a letter to Reynolds, January 31st, 1818 (Houghton's 'Life', I, 81), says: "I find that a maxim I met with the other day is a just one: 'On cause mieux quand on ne dit pas *causons*!'"

following sentence: "We never do anything well till we cease to think about the manner of doing it"; and at the end of his essay 'On Taste', he says: "Those who are conscious of their powers never do anything." Then there is a strong likeness between the "cursed fraction" in 'Sartor Resartus' (Bk. II, c. 4) and this remark on 'Hamlet' in Schlegel's 'Dramatic Lectures': "This enigmatical work resembles those irrational equations in which a fraction of unknown magnitude always remains, that will in no way admit of solution." And, once more, there is a curious resemblance between a remark of the old actor Macklin, quoted in his memoirs, and Carlyle's eulogy of the seventy-four in 'Latter-Day Pamphlets' (No. III, Downing Street). Said Macklin: "Ah! sir, an English man-of-war is the thing, after all. She speaks all languages—is the best navigator and the most profound politician in this island. She was always Oliver Cromwell's ambassador. She is one of the honestest Ministers of State that ever existed, and never tells a lie. Nor will she suffer the proudest Frenchman, Dutchman, or Spaniard to bamboozle her or give her a saucy answer." Carlyle makes Sauerteig ask: "Can anything be more unreasonable than a seventy-four? Articulately almost nothing. But it has . . . true rules both of sailing and conduct enough to keep it afloat on Nature's veridical bosom, after all. See, if you bid it sail to the end of the world, it

will lift anchor, go, and arrive ; the raging oceans do not beat it back. . . . If it meet an enemy's ship, it shivers it to powder ; and, in short, it holds on its way, and to a wonderful extent *does* what it means and pretends to do. Assure yourself, my friend, there is an immense fund of truth somewhere or other stowed in that seventy-four."

Of course, for once that Carlyle appropriates otherwise than avowedly he is a dozen times laid under contribution. One of the most flagrant of recent cases is that to be met with in a perusal of the discourse headed "Theodore Parker on the Guilt of Sin", in the widely-sold *Boston Monday Lectures* of the celebrated Mr. Joseph Cooke. "The mythology of the north," ambitiously observes the reverend gentleman, "has in it eternal verity and a kind of solemnity like that of the long-shining of the Arctic stars and the tumbling icebergs and the peaceable gurgle of the slow-heaving Polar Ocean, far-gleaming under the boreal lights of the midnight Arctic sun." To say nothing of the "eternal verity", does not "your Carlyle" tell how Teufelsdröckh [that nickname, by the way, was used in the Latin by Scaliger] stood on a July midnight, in the solitude of the North Cape, where was heard "nothing but the peaceable gurgle of the slow-heaving Polar Ocean, over which, in the utmost north, the great sun hangs low and lazy, as if he too were slumbering"? The amount of energy expended in lugging the

fine-sounding phrase into the lecture was surely sufficient to produce something original.

To descend from the sublime to the ridiculous, much might be said anent plagiarism in jokes. But here spoliation is so common that it is scarcely worth while to cite illustrations. In recent years *Punch* has published, without acknowledgment, a joke from 'Rob Roy', and one from Marryat's 'King's Own', to say nothing of the countless floating stories which cannot be traced to print.\* But he were a sour moralist indeed who should complain that *Punch* "reprend son bien partout" --which phrase, by the way, has itself been several times minted. It is claimed for Marmontel; but Des Portes, who died in 1606, has an epigram ending :

"Il faut que chacun ait le sien,  
Par tout le mien je puis reprendre."

Des Portes, it is clear, could hardly complain.

\* Early in 1884 it gave the old story of the stammerer's "He c-c-c-cured me".

## THE TRADE OF LITERATURE.

(1889.)

AN increasingly notable feature in the intellectual life of these days is the amount of attention that is being called, and given, to the pecuniary as distinguished from the spiritual affairs of authors. Never was there such a concentration of literary attention on the main chance. Biography indeed has long presented a large selection of anecdotes calculated to heighten on this side the interest taken by readers in the works they peruse: as, the record of the modest sum received by Milton for 'Paradise Lost'; the appropriately impressive intimation that Johnson wrote 'Rasselas' to pay for his mother's funeral; the story—now alas! placed in doubt by impious investigation—of the lexicographer's service to the impecunious Goldsmith in the sale of 'The Vicar of Wakefield'; the manner of the death of Chatterton; the rise of Crabbe; the early hardships and late debts of Balzac; the vast pecuniary success of Alison's 'History of Europe', read in these our days, probably, by no citizen of these kingdoms; the money-making of Sir Walter Scott; the gradual demoralisation of Byron from a lucre-scoring lyrist to a driver of hard bargains; the profits of Dickens and Macaulay; and so on through the field of general literature. But certainly at no time has the world been so copiously taken into the

commercial confidence of its literary ministrants as in the last few years. Symptoms of the new interest seemed to set in with the biography of George Eliot, in which not the least remarkable feature was the extreme stress laid by the great author on the pecuniary results of her performance. She doubtless took an artistic satisfaction in her work—she made at least one specific statement to that effect—but it did seem as if the artistic sentiment were a less permanent state of mind, so far as her letter-writing went, than a complacent sense of the financial situation. Then came the Authors' Conference and the complaints of Mr. Walter Besant; then the detailed account by Messrs. Harper of the sums they paid Carlyle for advance-sheets of his later works; then the detailed account by Mr. Ruskin's publisher of the history of his connection with his patron, with precise details as to the recent sale of the latter's works, and the profits derived by him therefrom.

But the story is not all of large hauls. There is the loss side to the account; the story of the hardships of Richard Jefferies; the avowal of Mr. Grant Allen that the need of an income made him abandon science and take to writing "vulgar novels". One way or the other, the public interest is chronically stimulated, and every now and then the topic, "How Authors Live," supersedes for a little while the broader question of "How the Poor Live", of which it is properly one of the subdivisions.

There is a widespread conviction that authors, like the other poor, we shall always have with us; though the effect of every new scrutiny of the fact is to raise, without solving, the problem how they contrive to exist. By many it is held that they will always make a precarious livelihood by reviewing each other's books. Doubtless, if the public could only get frightened or otherwise persuaded into believing there is a danger that authors, and consequently literature, may disappear from the scene, the matter would assume new phases; but certainly the persistence of the literary species for the last three hundred years, under conditions apparently always calculated to blot it out, leaves the outside world excused in its apathy on the subject. Commercially considered, literature is one of the most remarkable of human products, for, taken in the mass, it is got without paying for, and without any sort of provisory arrangements. A certain portion, indeed, is found to be paid for when the accounts are balanced; that is to say, there are some authors who are found to have lived by their work during some part of their lives—as Shakspere, Scott, Smollett, Dr. Johnson, Thackeray, Dickens, and George Eliot. In fact, not to strain matters, it is rather the rule than the exception in the particular departments of prose fiction and drama for authors to live by their work during some part of their lives; but this does not alter the fact that even prose fiction is in the main a fortuitous product, and that litera-

ture of other sorts is a species of chronic windfall to humanity. It is one of the proofs of Shakspere's overwhelming superiority that he made a solid success of life in the process of producing some of the greatest literature of the world ; but what is more notorious than the accidental character of his performance? Had he only inherited from his father a moderately flourishing business, it is morally certain he would never have written a play ; perhaps never even a sonnet ; and when he did write it was not to publish but to keep a theatre going with "copy". Had it even been a condition of his play-writing that his plays should never be published at all, as in point of fact it apparently was for the period of his life, there is every reason to suppose he would have been quite well pleased. To put the fact somewhat irreverently but accurately, Shakspere is the great fluke of literature. The world in his time paid him as a necessary official of the theatre, and it got the greatest work in English literature thrown into the bargain.

The law is perhaps not so clear in the other cases, but the difference is only one of detail. Scott was paid by the community during part of his life for work done by him as an advocate and a Sheriff, after he had been started in the career that suited him by the chance of his father's possessing a competence. Had his father been a poor workman, everything would have turned out differently. And certainly the poetry of Burns was a *trouvaille*, for which his countrymen have

to thank their stars, not their forethought. Thackeray, again, took to novel-writing of necessity when he had run through his patrimony ; and Dickens had to live as a pressman before he could work his way into literature. So, too, George Eliot received partly by the chance of her upbringing, and partly by living on her hack-work, the preparation which enabled her to produce the novels which "paid" her so well. Always the coming books can be seen to depend on the coincidence of a few chances, never on anything which society does or can do to prepare the way. And when we turn to those departments of literature which are concerned not with the amusement but with the instruction of the public, it seems almost a miracle that such matter should ever be produced at all. Whether it be Milton's epics or Hume's Essays, Gibbon's History or Mill's Political Economy, literature is seen to be the result of the accidental leisure or endowment of a few men who chanced to have the passion or the ambition to write. Had Gibbon been a grocer's son, or had Mill been made a clergyman or a doctor instead of a leisured official in the India Office, the course of historiography, logic, and economics would have been different to an indefinite extent ; and had Darwin not inherited a competence, the demonstration of the truth of Evolution might have been delayed by a generation. The course of literature would seem to be a matter of the casting of dice by destiny. It is impossible to doubt that

at any given moment there are many men with high natural capacities for literary production—barristers, doctors, teachers, journalists, laborers—who might have been brilliant producers if their lot had been cast a little differently ; who have either been forced to think above all things about earning a living, or been, like Shakspere, lacking in literary ambition, and so turned prudently to a calling that better promised a livelihood. There is a certain pecuniary temptation to write novels, and especially bad novels ; there is no such temptation to write poetry, history, or philosophy. The success of a Byron, an Alison, a Macaulay, is very exceptional and not in the ratio of merit. Besides, even these produced their work because they had previously other sources of income ; and if their work had been better they would probably have made much less than they did.

If, then, it be asked how authors contrive to live by their work, the answer is that in a large number of cases they never live by it, while in others they do so only after having maintained themselves or been maintained otherwise. Lord Tennyson, as we are reminded, got a pension of £200 as early as 1845 ; Wordsworth nourished his lofty soul on a sinecure ; Mr. Browning inherited money ; Carlyle was kept going in his early period by his wife's property ; Bishop Stubbs had certainly not lived by his historical researches ; Hill Burton had a "post" ; Mr. Arnold was an Inspector of Schools, and latterly

a pensioner ; Mr. Swinburne does not seem to have had to earn his living ; Mr. Lang and others boil the pot by means of journalism, producing more ambitious work in their scanty leisure ; Dr. George Macdonald and Mrs. Oliphant, those productive romancers, draw their £100 a year of pension, their books apparently not yielding them what they consider necessary to live on. The dispassionate inquirer is divided between displeasure at the spending of the national income on self-destructive ironclads rather than on literature, and the haunting suspicion that it is not at all easy to endow literature to much better purpose than is done at present. There is a certain plausibility in the Socialist assertion that matters at present go by pure haphazard, and that when once society learns to conduct itself rationally, the right men will be put in the right place, as a matter of course, in that as in other departments of activity, and the product maximised in quality. But when the sanguine Socialist is challenged as to the manner of readjustment, and called upon to say how he will sift the right poets and novelists from the mass of persons with manuscripts in their desks, he is apt to recoil like Macbeth before Macduff, and deprecate combat. The present system probably does not select one in ten of the most competent producers, but it at least sifts somehow, whereas a State Press would have a rather overwhelming problem to face. Happily we shall not have a State Press yet awhile ; and in the mean-

time we can consider the problem at our leisure, and even try experiments. The poets and novelists, it would seem, had better just be left to the struggle for survival ; the first, because there is evidently no inducement needed to make the majority of human beings write verse ; the second, because after all the novelists, good and bad, have the best chance of making a living as things go. But if any enthusiast were to suggest that it is rather better worth a nation's while to make posts for students and thinkers, historians and philosophers, than to multiply microcephalous militarists by land and sea, it would be difficult to gainsay him in the name of social science. The strongest argument against him would be the actual existence of an immense amount of University endowments, which seem to yield, in the way of literary and other tangible research, next door to nothing, so far as England is concerned. But they certainly seem to manage these things better abroad, and we might perhaps learn, if we were not as a nation more interested in money-making than in anything else. That, after all, is half the secret.

## II.

(May, 1890.)

WHEN Mr. John Morley takes up a subject we confidently look to hear something other than commonplace ; and we are not disappointed in the

case of his speech at the Royal Literary Fund Dinner the other night. It is pleasant, by the way, to find the toast of Literature, which was coupled with Mr. Morley's name, proposed by a Bishop. The Bishop of Ripon, on whom fell the function, was felicitous in his suggestion that "Mr. Morley would perhaps, as the author of 'Compromise', accept the toast even from him; and he was sure that the biographer of Burke would not think that the toast was less acceptable because it was proposed by one who wore the cloth of George Crabbe." The Bishop himself, it should be added, ought to be something of an authority on compromise, to judge from his suggestions for a list of the hundred best books of the last hundred years. He named fourteen authors; and alongside the names of Gray, Coleridge, Tennyson, George Eliot, Ruskin, Browning, Morris (Major), Scott, Dickens, and Thackeray, we have Sir Edwin Arnold, Mr. Shorthouse, Mr. Henry James, and Mrs. Burnett! A most catholic-minded bishop, beyond doubt. But more susceptible of discussion is Mr. Morley's speech in reply, which raises the problem of the commercial conditions of literature. Most Literary Fund speeches treat with discreet vagueness the practical side of the Fund's work; but Mr. Morley, rightly considering that the interest of a subject commonly lies near the heart of it, faced his task in that spirit.

"I often wonder," he asked, "whether there are fifty,

or even twenty, men and women who are earning a competence by the authorship of books, putting school books out of the question. We can depend upon it—and in saying this I am not sure that I ought not to address my remarks equally to the ladies who grace us with their presence to-night—that the book-writer, unless he chance to have a great natural gift for fiction, however frugal and homely his life, whatever his sources of accumulated knowledge, if he depends upon the authorship of books as his only resource, he or she will be likely to have a hard time of it."

Mr. Morley, who has successfully edited a review, a magazine, and a journal, besides writing half a dozen important books, must know something of the matter in question, and his proposition is not exactly reassuring.\* The following portion of his

\* A corroboration of Mr. Morley's view, the testimony given by Mr. John Addington Symonds in his posthumously published memoirs, is worth quoting here:—"I have just heard from Smith and Elder about the publication of my two volumes on the Catholic Revival. They offer me £150. In respect to 'Renaissance in Italy', I have already received £950. When then I have brought out these two volumes, I shall have had in all £1,100 for this long bit of work. Allowing for periods in which I was unfit to work, periods in which I sought a change of work, I find that I have spent eleven years upon this task, and pretty hard years of daily labour. The education which enabled me to attempt it was a very costly one, and the abilities which qualified me for it, though not first-rate, were at least unusual in their combination of many-sided intelligence with acquired knowledge and literary style. I have, then, been paid at the rate of £100 per annum; but I must deduct at least £50 per annum from my gains for books and travel, quite indispensable to the production. This I reckon as really far below the just allowance. Say then I have received £50 a year during the eleven best years of life for the execution of a laborious work, which implied an expensive education and unusual cast of intellect. The pay is about equal to

speech implies, though he does not make the statement in so many words, that the men and women who write books, not novels, live more or less by journalism in so far as they make their living by their work. It is true that after indicating this fact Mr. Morley made an eloquent peroration to the effect that he had full confidence in the future of letters in this country.

"I am fully persuaded," he said, "as I am sure all of you are, that the same moral energy, the same vivid intellectual perception, the same mastery of that great instrument, our language, which has made our literature one of the greatest triumphs of Great Britain—that all these qualities will remain, will operate, and will add still further in the future to that great capital which the renown of our men of letters has given to us, and will still further strengthen the moral dominion of our realm, which is more important to us than extent of territorial possessions, and more lasting than any material supremacy."

It is worth while asking on what it is that this confidence rests, having regard to Mr. Morley's previously expressed doubt as to whether there are fifty or even twenty men and women in this country who earn a competence by writing books, barring novelists and school-book makers.

Mr. Morley's argument would seem to be *a posteriori*. Alongside the journalism of the day, which shows great vivacity, industry, and conscientiousness, there is, he declares, "no cessation of great monumental works". Perhaps this is so. It is not quite easy to settle off-hand what

the wages of a third-class merchant's clerk or a second-class butler, the latter being also found in food and lodgings."

modern works are going to be monumental, or to say what English work of the last fifty years is likely to take as eminent a place in the history of literature as that of Gibbon. But there can be no question that works of great industry and ability continue to be produced—by writers who, in the terms of the case, cannot earn a living by writing them. How, then, are such works produced at all? Here we come once more to the old answer: Literature, apart from fiction, is for the most part a social "fluke". It is the outcome of certain concurrent accidents of scholarly aptitude and inherited or otherwise fortuitous income. Sometimes a professor or other person paid to fulfil certain public duties, writes books over and above; in which case the book is as much a fluke as in any other. Either from such disinterested laborers, or from men who have chanced to inherit an income, do we get our histories and our philosophies, and much of our poetry. Shelley, Byron, and Browning started with money endowments. Coleridge's life was darkened by his inability to make up for the want of lucre. Wordsworth had a little, which after a time was supplemented by a public sinecure. Tennyson had a little; and at one time was glad to take a pension, as was Arnold, even in his latter years, after having long held a salaried office. Arnold ought hardly to have needed the pension, any more than Carlyle, who among leading modern writers, not novelists, comes by his frugality nearest the self-

supporting standard. But then even Carlyle got some money with his wife ; and it is clear that writers of works of research in general cannot have lived by their writings, even when these are successful. Mr. Freeman, Mr. Froude, Mr. Lecky, Bishop Stubbs, are all widely read authors; but they could not have lived by their books. Grote and Sharpe were bankers, as is Sir John Lubbock ; the two Mills worked for their living in the India House, as did Charles Lamb. Mr. Spencer has as good as avowed that his books could never have maintained him, and Lewes did his most important work after he did not need to earn his living by his pen. Mr. Ruskin, again, had a fortune, though, like Tennyson and even Browning, he has made a large income from his books in his latter years. It is only the novelists who seem able to live by book-making ; and even when they write too many novels by way of making their income, they seem often glad of a pension to help them to make ends meet. Decidedly, literature is a social fluke.

It remains true, of course, that as we have had our literature fortuitously in the past we are likely to have it in the future ; so that Mr. Morley's confidence is in a sense reasonable. It may be doubted, however, whether either Mr. Morley or his readers can feel quite elate over the prospect when the stress of peroration is over. One has an uneasy feeling that things are not exactly as they should be ; that there is a want of science

and providence in a social system in which literature is a perpetual fluke. A certain amount of machinery exists which is understood to aim at providing to some extent for the continuation of serious literature—university endowments, for instance ; but it does not appear that these produce much of the literature in question. One literary fund, again, is subscribed to by a good many people who perceive with concern that it is impossible to live by writing books, unless they are popular novels ; but now Mr. Morley tells us that the fund exists for the help of those journalists and other professional literary persons who "have made a mistake in their vocation". It would be interesting to know how this announcement strikes the subscribers. There are charitable purposes more provocative of enthusiasm than that of helping persons who have made a mistake in their vocation ; though in literature it would seem everyone has mistaken his vocation who thinks to live by it. Altogether the riddle of the painful earth does not look perceptibly brighter after Mr. Morley's speech ; and his "full confidence in the future of letters in this country" does him great credit. After all, however, he has perhaps done the best that was possible to him in the circumstances. "Youth," he declared,

"must always have its struggle and battle ; and I have heard from those who have now grasped glittering bubbles of fame and reputation that the days of their youth, when they were in solitary chambers with not too much to eat, when they had within them the fire of the zeal for truth

and knowledge, and all the enthusiasm and illusions of youth—that those, after all, were not the least happy portions of their lives."

That is a good old text; and perhaps it will do as much as any other to stimulate to the production of good literature. Still, one would have liked to know where the graspers of the glittering bubbles of fame and reputation got the money that presumably accompanied these *desiderata*—and how much they got.

## III.

(1889.)

It hardly needed the very plain language of Mr. Walter Besant in the *Contemporary Review* to let us know that the work of the Society of Authors, as he understands it, has nothing to do with literature beyond safeguarding the pockets of literary men. That view of the case came out sufficiently in the speeches at the recent annual dinner. The Earl of Pembroke cited it as a disgrace to civilisation that whereas 400,000 copies of 'Robert Elsmere' had been sold in America, Mrs. Humphry Ward had got nothing for them; and Mr. Besant in responding to the toast of the evening seems to have dwelt mainly on the Civil List Pension Fund. Now, it must have struck many literary and non-literary readers of the report that there are a good many more serious disgraces to civilisation than the failure of a lady who has made a great deal of

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money by a novel in her own country to get a great deal more money for it in another country where the book was reprinted. There is getting abroad in these days a perception that the traditional theory of human remuneration is somewhat lacking in rational and moral basis. There is a growing conviction that it is a "disgrace to civilisation" that millions of men and women, whose labor produces all the wealth of the world, should have only a bare subsistence for their lifelong toil, with interludes of starvation and an old age of penury. The hardship of any one of these individuals, rationally regarded, is a much more deplorable thing than the grievance of Mrs. Humphry Ward, who, as against her service to society, is understood to have received a very fair share of the good things of the world, not requiring even to earn her living. And when Mr. Walter Besant, in his *Contemporary* article on the old Society of British Authors, exults once more in the prospect of the enormous gains that will be made by *one or two universally popular writers* when international copyright is secured, it becomes necessary to protest, in the name of the calling of letters, that literature is discredited and not promoted by the people who thus seem to view it chiefly as a means by which a few men may make more money than the most skilful stockbrokers or gold-miners.

The work which the first Society of Authors failed to do, and which the new Society is really

doing under Mr. Besant's auspices, is in every way a good one. To give counsel to authors as regards their transactions with publishers, to secure that the former rather than the latter shall get the bulk of the profit from each book—this is a really philanthropic undertaking ; and Mr. Besant has done a most valuable service in setting it properly on foot : he helps the ruck of stragglers to fair play while professing to be most excited about the spoils in store for the few, of whom he evidently hopes to be one. But if he improves the position of authors in one way he lowers it in another by his ostentatious assumption that " the only point which can unite members of any profession " is " their material interests ". Are authors then really a lower order of organisms than clergymen ? Is there no such thing as a sincere concern among literary men for the improvement of the craft in all its branches, as apart from the improvement of their own individual incomes ; for the promotion of good and honest work and the discouragement of the dishonest and specious ? Mr. Besant treats us to some not very costly sarcasm about the attitude of authors towards each other, their egoism, their jealousy, their self-conceit. It is not necessary to be an author to see that these are merely the universal frailties of mankind, cropping up among authors as among other people. After all, one author is rather more often heard praising the work of another than a shopkeeper is found extolling the goods of a rival shopkeeper. But if

authors in general, who as such assume to themselves the title and the capacity to teach other men something for their good, are incapable of *esprit de corps* to the extent even of wishing to raise the whole standards of literature, there is more sarcasm in store for Mr. Besant's profession than he wots of.

Certainly it is a great thing that authors should by joint action better their financial position. There are few things more painful in history than the story of how Goldsmith had to wear himself out in dull drudgery, getting only trifling sums down for his most masterly work, out of which the booksellers of his generation made fortunes. But the mere combination of authors against the publishers will not hinder other painful occurrences, such as the fall of Richard Jefferies under the burden of the toil by which he had to keep the pot boiling. It may not be easy for more fortunate authors to help a man of genius so situated, or to secure that the honest workers shall be encouraged in literature and the charlatans kept out ; but when it comes to avowing that authors do not even care to try to do these things, pessimism is at a discount. Mr. Besant may rest assured that if he insists on being regarded principally as a money-grubber he will stand a fair chance of having his fill of the honor ; the public being not unready to take up towards a man the attitude he professes to take up towards them. The higher man of letters, now as always, will be content to

earn a fair living at the pursuits he loves: the writer who avowedly gasps for wealth may get the wealth but will not get esteem with it. Mr. Besant makes a grave mistake when he says it is ill-will on the part of the American Government, as apart from the American people, towards Britain that retards international copyright; and he is still more plainly in error when he talks as if the "gain" of non-copyright in America were solely to the publishers there. It is clearly to the people; since competition will keep down the publishers' gains in that as in any other form of free commerce. And when he asks the people of the States to offer facilities, not for the sustenance of good literature as a whole in both countries, but for the acquisition of fortunes by a few pre-eminently *popular* writers—as the Haggards, the Besants, and the novelists whom Mr. Gladstone advertises, who are all pretty well off as it is—he is not persuasive. Why, to apply his own principle, should any of us, authors or readers, Americans or British, want to make Mr. Besant a millionaire? His books are really not worth that. We may not be all Socialists yet; but we are mostly past discriminating between species of millionaire, or wanting to cultivate the organism.

## IV.

(1891.)

THE chronic discussion as to the desirableness of

an English Academy having revived, it is at least a good thing that we should have on the subject the voice of such a distinguished literary practitioner as M. Taine. As a rule, the utterances on this topic, since Arnold, are little fitted to provoke serious discussion such as that in which Arnold was annihilated by Spencer. It came out lately that Mr. Rider Haggard is against a literary academy, from which it may be concluded that Mr. Andrew Lang is opposed to the institution; but that circumstance, satisfactory as far as it goes, does not stir up much reflection. M. Taine, however, is not only in favor of an English Academy in the interests of English literature, but, after his wont, he offers historical argument, put with his old vivacity, in support of his view. "It must be patent to all who read," he says to an interviewer, "that the English language is deteriorating from the grand tongue that was shown at its best in the writings of Swift. The language was used in all its purity by Lord Macaulay and by the one living writer of whom I can say the same—Lord Tennyson. The degradation of the English language, such as is to be deplored to-day, was begun by Carlyle. Had an Academy been in existence in England this degradation would have been pointed out, branded, and warned against." Now, M. Taine is unquestionably well entitled to speak on the subject of English style, having written an admirably intelligent and entertaining History of English Literature,

which for many British readers has proved a stronger attraction to the subject than any native compilation. Yet one may venture to say that in the judgment above cited M. Taine reveals rather the growing force of his conservative bias than the sagacity and breadth of his earlier criticism.

That account of Swift's style, to begin with—will it stand examination? It differs strikingly from the account in the 'History', which, however, is also questionable. Swift, says M. Taine in that work, "has the style of a surgeon and of a judge, cold, grave, solid, without ornament, or vivacity, or passion, entirely virile and practical. He seeks neither to please, nor to divert, nor to attract, nor to move; he never chances to hesitate, to reiterate, to excite himself, or make an effort. He pronounces his thought in a compact style, in terms that are exact, precise, often crude," and so on. But take down Swift's 'Tale of a Tub', to which M. Taine had just before referred, and you will find in a few pages a variety of neologisms and euphuisms and extravagances of style which put his verdict out of court. You have such phrases as "uncontrollable demonstration", "zoography and topography", "pruences and protuberances", "physiological scheme of oratorial receptacles or machines"; and such phrases as that about wit which "by the smallest transposal or misapplication is utterly annihilate"; and such sentences as: "Now I do affirm it will be absolutely impossible for the can-

did peruse to go along with me in a great many bright passages, unless upon the several difficulties emergent he will please to capacitate and prepare himself by these directions." The truth is that Swift, so often rashly cited as a writer of chaste and classic English, was, when he produced some of his most famous works, a daring neologist and humorist in style, his exuberant genius finding vent in fantastic locutions and voluminous constructions. It might better have suited M. Taine's purpose to cite Addison, who was certainly chaste and simple enough ; but perhaps he remembered how, in the 'History', he decided in that connection that "the decorums of society, which attenuate expression, deaden style : by reason of regulating what is spontaneous and tempering what is vehement, they introduce a language insignificant and uniform. . . . Every idea has its accent, and all our care ought to be to render it frank and simple on our paper as it is in our mind." That maxim, as it happens, really goes too far in the direction of countenancing Carlyle, who certainly sought (so says even General Hamley) to word his thought just as it phrased itself in his talk, which was formed on the model of his father's. A writer's very thought may be mannered, and his style may follow suit.

Certainly, Carlyle's style is unnatural and irritating ; but where is the evidence that it has demoralised English literature, as M. Taine says? Who now writes like Carlyle? He certainly cor-

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rupted the style of such writers as John Forster and Professor Masson, and he slightly infected Dickens and Kingsley ; but in the last thirty years there has been as much good English prose written as in the sixty years before, even if we do not exclude Lamb, whose individuality and wayward magic of style ought to render him tabu to the M. Taine of to-day—and, indeed, even in the 'History' Lamb's style is not so much as glanced at. It is not quite clear what M. Taine is driving at when he declares Carlyle to have "begun" the "degradation of the English language". Carlylese has passed away ; and sound English is written by scores of writers, who neither toy with archaism, like Lord Tennyson, nor cultivate staccato with Macaulay—a great writer, doubtless, who, however, influenced some men's style for the worse just as Carlyle did. It would seem that M. Taine is struck by the greater range of vocabulary and subtlety of construction in modern English, and puts it all down as "degradation". If that be so, we can but answer that he who cannot see artistic evolution in the styles of Ruskin and Pater, Mr. Stevenson and Mr. Lowell, and classic purity in those of Arnold and Newman, is stiffening in his intellectual habitudes and falling into the old snare of conservatism.

And this brings us to the practical side of the Academy question. If we had an Academy, should we be any safer against epidemics of Carlylism or any other perversion of style?

Would any Academy have put Carlyle out of countenance? On the other hand, would not an Academy be likely to set its face, not merely against the Carlyles but against the Macaulays (for Macaulay's style was new enough once), and, what is worse, against the Lambs and the Russkins and the Paters and the George Eliots and the Lowells, making much of their extravagance and weaknesses, an' little of their originality and skill and strength? All observation goes to suggest this; and the inference is that if we had had an English Academy and it had had any influence, we might have suffered injurious repression of some of the rarest qualities in our literature. Shakspere was one of the greatest and also one of the most reckless neologists that ever lived; Marlowe exhibited extreme extravagance while establishing our blank verse; and Wordsworth and Coleridge, to mention no others, regenerated poetry in the teeth of an overwhelming convention. After all at we have more writers of sound nervous prose than ever; and it is not in England but in France, with its Academy, that there has risen the school of the "decadents", some of whom play tricks with language that Carlyle could never have dreamt of. In fine, an Academy can neither prevent bad writing nor produce good. The French Academy did not correct Hugo, had an English one would not correct Mr. Swinburne. An English Academy would in all probability scout masterpieces and reject genius as the French Academy scouted 'Le

Cid' in the past and cold-shoulders genius in our own day. Certainly our whole intellectual life, considered in its connection with our socio-commercial life, is a marvel of haphazard ; but an Academy is not the way to put it on a scientific basis. As things go, we shall probably continue to have good prose without an Academy, as France came by the prose of Courier and Flaubert without much Academic intervention.

## DE MORTUIS.

### I.

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

(1888.)

THE full force of the old maxim, *De mortuis nil nisi bonum*, comes upon us only now and then when one whom we have been used to criticise, without ill-will but yet with seriousness, is suddenly struck down in the midst of his activity. So has it been with Matthew Arnold. No man of equal eminence in recent years has died quite so unexpectedly ; and human hearts will always be pliant to the pathos of such tragic surprises. For many, therefore, whose regard for the living man had not been very warm, there must have been something indefinably wounding in the hostile phrases that nearly every obituariising journalist mixed with his praise of the dead. There in the kinsman's house lay the quiet corpse, forever dumb to the stricken mourners bowed in their anguish around it, forever deaf to the loud world beyond.

" His lips are very mild and meek :  
Tho' one should smite him on the cheek  
And on the mouth, he will not speak."

To speak dispraise just then seemed almost like accusing to its unmoving face, white with the ultimate pallor, the still form that could return neither rebuke nor defence : one felt somewhat as Ulysses

spoke when those about him uttered irreverence over the bodies of the slain enemies.

It was of course only an unreasoning sentiment; the praise and the dispraise were equally addressed to the listening world; and the critics were perfectly within their right. The men who have criticised and influenced the world must needs be themselves criticised after death as before; and after all nothing is gained by suppressing the negative criticism just at the moment when most thought is being given to the subject. Yet to this moment I have a certain difficulty in restating to myself old judgments, deliberately enough arrived at, on Arnold's thought and work, and a sense of satisfaction in turning to those qualities and faculties in him on which there is nothing but praise to be passed. The truth is that when all is done he leaves, even in minds antipathetic to his on many points, a kindly feeling towards him; and this is not a bad proof that the man was good, and a force for good. Both things are clear, indeed, when we look at Arnold's career as a whole. From first to last no one can doubt either his conscientiousness or the constancy of his enthusiasm for humanity. It was not a consuming fire, but it was something not worse, a pure and steady flame, never clouded by self-seeking or indifference. It was the details of the policy that one quarrelled with, never the spirit and purpose.

Nor is there any teacher about whose purpose and drift there can be less dubiety. In half-a-

dozen telling phrases, either new or re-minted, which have passed into current speech and literature, he set out his ideals and his warnings; serenely pleading for "sweetness and light" and "lucidity"; gravely impeaching the society which consisted of "Barbarians, Philistines, and Populace"—"an upper class materialised, a middle class vulgarised, a lower class brutalised"; lauding the ideal of "sweet reasonableness" and recommending it with an idealised picture of the Gospel Jesus, of which he could not or would not see the falsity; smilingly labelling the popular deity as a "magnified, non-natural man", compounded of "three Lord Shaftesburys"; and urging on men a higher conception of a "something not ourselves which makes for righteousness". One is glad to believe that the net amount of good result was greater than many anticipated in view of the infirmities of the teaching, which on the face of it was a singular compound of the progressive and the reactionary. One of the points which he pressed most effectively at the outset of his career was that Englishmen had need to deliver themselves from their vicious partiality for anomalies; that things would not be well with us till the fact that a doctrine or institution was a confessed anomaly were seen to be a decisive reason for getting rid of it. Yet much of the activity of his later life went to the championship of anomaly naked and unashamed; to the assertion of a moral value of a Bible whose history and

theology he had confessedly ceased to believe ; to the defence of a Church whose creed he had declared to be irrational and superseded. He it was who told Colenso he ought to have written his books in Latin, so that none but the studious and the clergy should read them—he, who had declared it to be a vice in his countrymen that they clung to anomalies.

Wherein then lay, or whence came, the good results of his teaching ? In two things : the perfect temper in which he always delivered himself, which was itself a civilising example of incalculable value ; and the inevitable tendency of his reasoning to carry men further than he himself had gone. I have heard many men say that Arnold had made them Freethinkers by suavely dissolving their old beliefs for them and leaving them incapable of his own amiable compromises : I can hardly think of any who with any zest or success maintain his bi-frontal attitude of unbelieving religiosity. It is not given to many men to keep going to church with zeal, neither praying nor adoring, by way of helping to turn the ancient machine of the Church to purposes which are rightly to be served only by a new machinery. It is not given to many to be enthusiastic about a " religious education ", on the basis of the Bible, of which the object is to teach a non-Biblical morality and a non-Biblical theory of life. Arnold stood practically alone in his attitude towards Colenso. With all their bias to the anomalous,

the majority of Englishmen set certain limits to the practice of avowedly running with the hare and hunting with the hounds. The admission that Colenso was right—in Latin—served only to bring non-Latinists to the side of Colenso ; the explanation that the God of Christianity was a magnified non-natural man, and the Trinity three Lord Shaftesburys, tended only to make men cease praying to the one and singing glory to the other, and therefore to abandon the Church and all her works.

Arnold's own anomaly-mongering, I think, is largely to be attributed to the influence on him of the strong personality of his father, who was a devout religionist with just enough of rationality to make his strenuous piety look dignified rather than fanatical. The father, as some of the son's opponents have pointed out, could not have held the son's position in practice with the son's beliefs, having a more straightforward if a simpler cast of mind. "David the son of Goliath" was Mr. Swinburne's witty and unwontedly concise characterisation (or perhaps it was someone else's, as he said) of his fellow poet and critic. But David never shook off Goliath's authority ; the powerful Philistine's influence magnetised the child of light to the last ; and his *manes* were never left quite unpeased. Indeed, to drop the conventional use of the figure, the Hellenic-Hebrew, with his gracefully undevout dancing before the ark, and his blending of fresh poetry with

stale ritual, has irritated Gentile nerves which the solid giant of Philistia left unruffled. And it is right to remember that it was from his father that Arnold got his essential earnestness of relation to life, and the main elements of his prose style.

Mention of the poet and the stylist turns our thought from the teacher to the writer ; and the change involves a transition from qualified blame to almost unmixed praise. Arnold's prose even when least perfect is pure and artistic—a species of classicism in undress : its fault then is that it lounges and dawdles with an air of meaning to be irresistible : but at its best it is surpassed by no English workmanship—or by any French, for that matter. After having read it all, years ago, I was decidedly of opinion that his 'Friendship's Garland' was surest to live, because the concision there impressed on his utterance by newspaper exigencies had given it a steel-like quality that was safer to resist tear and wear in a busy world than the more porous texture of his other work ; and I am not disposed to depart from that view when I reflect how much sounder was his position—to say nothing of the brilliance of his unembittered wit—in his attack on the ill-culture of his country than in his attempts to remove Dagon from the temple and yet keep the worshippers adoring vacancy. But one cannot well doubt that his political essays too have a long lease of life, because future historians will have to study our political literature, and it must needs

be a blessed experience to them to come across the essays of a man who could write honestly and originally on politics in choice, living, organic prose ; just as they will on the other hand be disposed to turn oftener to the speeches of Sir William Harcourt than to those of some more earnest men.

Above prose stands poetry in the old category ; and Arnold will leave it unaltered, for his exquisite verse is fit to set above his exquisite prose. Little as he wrote, comparatively speaking, he yet like most poets wrote too much : that is to say, he produced a good deal of imperfect as well as of perfect work. But that seems inevitable in the majority of cases ; and it is no great hardship to have to do the picking and choosing. His verse is sometimes pedestrian ; much of it is only half-inspired ; but it has almost always "distinction", to use one of his own favorite terms ; and it was always his own voice that spoke in it. And how incomparable is the speech at its perfectest ! People just now are quoting much that is not of the highest, verse that is perfect rhetoric rather than pure poetry ; and indeed no one ever did such verse more admirably. Who can forget, once read, such lines as these :

"Once read thy own breast right.  
And thou hast done with fears ;  
Man gets no other light,  
Search he a thousand years.

Seek in thyself, there ask what ails thee, at that shrine."  
But his immortality will rather rest on his work

of a rarer inspiration, in which words become magical as great music, fusing thought and feeling in one thrilling *poiesis* that seems to make for us a new sphere of sensation. Of course different organisms are differently touched. I can never conquer the deep, melancholy cadences of 'Dover Beach'; the strange re-kindling of ancient mystic woe in 'Philomela'; the golden sweetness of Callicles' song of 'Cadmus and Harmonia'; the great picture of the river at the close of 'Sohrab and Rustum'; the crystalline beauty of the loveliest passages of 'The Scholar Gypsy' and 'Thyrsis'; the piercing lyric wail of the 'Forsaken Merman'; the pathos of some of those verses in the group titled 'Switzerland', in which the poet had the courage to avow a youthful love such as Puritan and even un-Puritan England is apt to frown upon. Not to quote is impossible when one speaks of Arnold's verse; but space is inexorable, and one can but repeat a few lines that are characteristic of the dead poet's most individual cast of thought. First, the incomparable ending of 'The Future', incomparable, that is, as verse, not as theory:

"Haply, the river of Time—  
As it grows, as the towns on its marge  
Fling their wavering lights  
On a wider, statelier stream—  
May acquire, if not the calm  
Of its early mountainous shore,  
Yet a solemn peace of its own.  
And the width of the waters, the hush  
Of the grey expanse where he floats

Freshening its current and spotted with foam  
 As it draws to the Ocean, may strike  
 Peace to the soul of the man on its breast—  
*As the pale waste widens around him,*  
*As the banks fade dimmer away,*  
*As the stars come out, and the night-wind*  
*Brings up the stream*  
*Murmurs and scents of the infinite sea."*

The finest verse is always melancholy ; and still one quotes a significant stanza of the mournful andante of ' Human Life ' :

" Ah ! let us make no claim,  
 On life's incognisable sea,  
 To too exact a steering of our way ;  
 Let us not fret and fear to miss our aim,  
 If some fair coast has lured us to make stay,  
 Or some friend hailed us to keep company ; "

with the closing sigh, so suggestive of the poet's fate in the intellectual life, over

" The friends to whom we had no natural right,  
 The homes that were not destined to be ours."

The profound sadness of ' Dover Beach ' constitutes a pessimism so much apart from Arnold's normal attitude to life that its wonderful harmonies cannot be cited by way of illustrating his thought; but there is only a saddening of his ordinary speech in the picture of England in ' Heine's Grave ' :

" The weary Titan, with deaf  
 Ears, and labor-dimm'd eyes,  
 Regarding neither to right  
 Nor left, goes passively by,  
 Staggering on to her goal ;  
 Bearing on shoulders immense,  
 Atlanteän, the load,  
 Well nigh not to be borne,  
 Of the too vast orb of her fate."

The best of the serener verses, as those fine lines which end the 'Summer Night', declaring

"How fair a lot to fill  
Is left to each man still!"

are somehow not quite so moving, moving as they are.

Thinking of them all, with their manifold music, one hardly feels it ungracious to say that the critic was not so consummate as the poet. On that head, indeed, we are in these latter days pretty much agreed: the time is past for the classing of Arnold as a master in criticism. He lacked perfect appreciativeness; his sensibilities were wayward, and capable of being swayed and blunted by old prejudices and new theories; he could not hold the balances even; he could be grotesquely unfair. His real importance in criticism lies not in his judgments, which are too often reversible, but in the temper he brought to it. And this, as we said, was an influence bound up with all his work, beneficially affecting alike theology and politics. In our entire literature there is no man equally energetic and proselytist, equally various in his activities, who is over all so perfectly urbane, so free from asperity alike on public and private grounds. He never returned railing for railing, and he rarely proffered any. It was only in a sonnet that he once called a preacher "Restless Fool!" and only once was he moved, I think, to the warmth which fired that characterisation of

Macaulay in which the great *quasi*-Philistine was pronounced "intolerable". Once was he worse than warm. It was over the old Hyde Park riots; and then, in the very act of setting forth that the special vice of the Populace was to use force brutally, he proceeded to quote approvingly his father's dictum that "the Tarpeian rock" was the eternal, ever-fit prescription for all ringleaders in any rioting, and other punishment the fit treatment for their followers, no matter what their pretext might be. Said blandly, it was a sufficient proof of the truth of the confession that even the lover of culture could retain some of the instincts of savagery; a proof indeed that the Barbarian and the Philistine could be more truly brutal than the Populace. But one can well forget that now, after the life that made so little for brutality, even when the wayward judgment at times declared for the barbarous cause.

He is rightly to be remembered as the modern Hellene, beauty-loving, calm, placable, graceful even in his perversities, an artist in heart and thought, a lover of righteousness and of his fellow-men. Not the least pleasing aspect of him is that in which he appears to us just before his death, supple enough in body at threescore years and six, like a true Hellene, to leap a gate as a boy might; overflowing with good humor to the last. And one could be glad for him that he had such an end, falling lifeless in a time of quiet happiness, and never tasting the bitterness of death—

were it not for the thought of those who *are* feeling it, living.

## II.

ROBERT BROWNING.  
(1889.)

IT is one-and-twenty years now since the line to the "British public, ye who like me not," came in the prelude to a great book to challenge its writer's countrymen to a new judgment. It was at the end of the same book that the poet gave the other salute to the "British public, who may like me yet"; and there can be no question to-day that the half-defiant, half-smiling prophecy has been fulfilled. In many a heart and household constituting a much wider public than the merely British one which he challenged, Robert Browning's death will create a sense of bereavement, as keen perhaps as has been caused by the loss of any English-speaking poet during the century. The homely word "liking", of course, hardly expresses the feeling Browning has inspired. The tribute that has followed him of late years is rather an extension of that intellectual admiration which, after all, had not been wanting before the appearance of 'The Ring and the Book'. The author of 'Men and Women' could not miss the homage of many a good lover of poetry while he was yet in his prime; and it was certainly not that 'The Ring and the Book',

with its four volumes of strange blank verse, captivated a more popular taste than that which had before relished the mellower flavors of the poet's lyrical masterpieces. What has happened is that in the last twenty years, though the "British public" in the mass has certainly not been transfigured, the number of cultured people has greatly increased, and the general widening of modern thought has made an audience for a poet far too original to be welcomed on his first appearance. And of late he has even had a sort of factitious popularity, the vogue which comes of being intellectually in the fashion, and which means that a number of people have been made to feel they ought to admire what they had not spontaneously taken to. But with all reasonable allowance for that kind of reputation, it is certain that Browning has established himself among the English-speaking peoples as one of the greatest poets of his age and of their literature. He dies at a time that some will feel, however regretfully, to be fitting—at the highest point his fame has yet reached, apparently without having felt his vigor decline, though he has lived seven-and-seventy strenuous years. A great part of his poetic gospel was that men should fully live their lives. He has splendidly lived his.

There is no want of goodwill, though there may seem to be some callousness, in saying that the near future might have seen, had he lived, some reaction against the now suddenly silenced

poet's renown, well won and slowly built up though it has been. There is some grimness in the pathos of the news that just before the end he had sent a declaration of his satisfaction at the message that his forthcoming volume was being largely ordered ; for it is also announced that the demand for 'Asolando' had been as one to six compared with the call for the new volume by Lord Tennyson. Browning's death will at least help to lessen that disproportion. The poet's last song has its special preciousness, and it is to be read with a heart attuned to duteous memory rather than to cool criticism. And the British public has still some cause to add to its sorrow the sentiment of remorse. It has lost a great poet, and it can ill afford to think for the moment of anything but the loss. It is for his disciples to claim for him an unstinted tribute in the spirit of those who, in his own fine idealising poem, chanted their lofty praise—"This is our master, famous, calm, and dead, borne on our shoulders." Only some of us can bow to that acclaim the more devoutly because of the perception that the brave old master's work was as good as done.

If obscure in point of fashion of expression, Browning is certainly not obscure in the drift of his teaching. He is not a merely didactic poet—he is something more than that ; but he has given to his time a general body of teaching which can be summed up with little hesitation. Alike his vivid presentments of humanity in action, and

his necessarily less poetic exposition of his own philosophy, strike the note of buoyant optimism, easily seen to be constitutional. It was not that he rigorously thought out life and came to a strongly hopeful view ; he was cast in a rarely sanguine vital mould, and that determined his philosophy. This is not the place or the time to give reasons for or against that philosophy as such ; the point is that though too brilliantly spontaneous and individual to capture at once even the people to whom it really appealed, it does not seem to suffice for the modern mind. It has been now fully caught up, so to speak, by the intelligence of Browning's educated contemporaries ; but that intelligence is not resting in Browning. And the reason is just the *naïveté*, the primitiveness—to put it bluntly—of optimism, which is his main note. His solution of the riddle of the painful earth is a trifle too easy, too self-regarding, too egoistic. He has drunk of a very full cup of life, and it is always with the glow visibly in his veins that he speaks. He has hardly seen the riddle, in fact. He dies in his winter home in Italy—" My Italy ", as he once exultingly sang—thus rounding off his copious life where he lived so much of it, well surrounded, far from the madding crowd, whose strife, ignoble to the self-centred poetic eye, looms in its mass so tragically and so gigantically through the dim air that Browning left behind. Nor does his prosperous serenity, valuable though it has been as feeding

his manifold song, raise him to the windless heights where Shakspere sits—Shakspere, whom he persisted in thinking his prototype. The Shakspere who wrote the sonnets was, to Browning's mind, "the less Shakspere" if he thereby "unlocked his heart," the modern poet thinking that *he* knew better than that. It was a happy illusion; his poetry is so vital as it is just because his own heart is always beating in it, just because his own loves and yearnings can be read between the lines. It was Browning, it was not Shakspere, who challenged the British public for not liking him; and the man who wrote 'Lear' was not an optimist of the Browning school.

But, indeed, one does not need to be of the Browning school to feel that the foregoing is not an adequate account of the dead poet when one thinks what was the stature and the reach of the man who has been taken away. True, he was not a philosopher; he was rather a wonderfully vivacious literary psychologist. Still less was he—as some say—scientific: his was not the temper of science. But with what an energy, with what a power, with what a splendid persistence did he work out the faith that was in him! Let us shun of all things the miscarriage of those who, unsympathetic to his teaching and his manner, have never really felt the ringing music that is so uniquely his. We should miss half his significance if we did not see how well he exemplifies the truth declared by Emerson, that the main and

final thing in all writing is the feeling it gives that there is a man behind it. Browning has won greatness, and will keep it, because he has been so unflinchingly true to himself, because he so triumphantly "gives to the world assurance of a man." His great contemporary Tennyson has indeed put much more of sustained beauty and of loving craftsmanship in his song ; but neither Tennyson nor any other since Shakspere has so fully deserved the crowning praise of being at all moments intensely alive. So forceful is he, so masterly in his inspiration, that he dominates even where he does not enlighten. But where and when he does both, who can outshine his burning radiance, or outsing the profound vibration of his song ? In the heaven of poetry there are many mansions, and Browning's subtlety and range of passion are certainly not to be put lower than Arnold's simplicity of sad sweet reverie, and Tennyson's range of golden song. In poem after poem does he seem to pierce into the human heart, if not "deeper than ever the Andante dived", as he aspired to do, yet with a strange penetration that is felt to be rarer and higher than ripe wisdom or far-reaching thought. And the fitting word over his grave is that the great singers, of whom he is one, are indeed as rare and as precious to mankind as the great thinkers are precious, and something easier to love.

## III.

EDMOND SCHERER.  
(1889.)

It is not a year since France lost, in the person of Emile Hennequin in his prime, the most remarkable of the new generation of her critics: it is in the fulness of his years that she buries Edmond Scherer, who represents in her critical literature the generation between that of the great Sainte-Beuve and that of to-day. M. Scherer, indeed, is not to be spoken of as in any sense superannuated: for us on this side of the Channel he is indeed very freshly modern: only in France he is distinguishable from the younger men, especially from such a one as Hennequin, who had brought to the treatment of literature a spirit of positive science that is in a sense a stage ahead, in evolution, of the admirably intelligent temper of the writer who has just died. It would be a waste of time to attempt a symmetrical scheme in which Sainte-Beuve, Scherer, and Hennequin should be made to exemplify exactly in literary criticism the strides of the modern intelligence: for one thing, Sainte-Beuve was the most highly gifted of the three in some of the most important faculties of the critic; and he was perhaps even more modern, more original for his day than either of the others for theirs. But all the same the three do broadly represent such a progression as is above hinted at. Sainte-Beuve exhibits the

first entrance of the spirit of science in modern criticism ; Scherer may be described as in part a result produced by the action of that spirit on minds which accepted it doubtfully, tardily, and with reserves ; Hennequin, cut off in his flower, represents the assured tone of science come to stay, confident in its power and in its destiny. Beyond this it would be unsafe to carry the classification ; Hennequin, in his turn, being perhaps more conscious of scientific purposes and possibilities than triumphant in realising them ; perhaps less ripe—as at his age he might very well be—in his way than his great predecessors in theirs. What is certain is that Scherer, like Sainte-Beuve, had a great endowment of all-round perspicacity, a gift of realising a sane and expert judgment on widely different types of men and things, of making himself critically at home in many fields of intellectual life, and of writing about them in a way worth the attention of the special cultivators of each. We have never had such critics in this country. Macaulay and Carlyle, indeed, have dealt with many aspects of life ; but in comparison with the great French critics they are stiff and unversatile ; and even Mr. Arnold, who most suggests the French catholicity, has the British note finally in his predominant didacticism, as of a superior preacher. His un-British lightness of hand, indeed, he learned largely from Sainte-Beuve ; but Scherer could claim it as a birthright. It is only because

Sainte-Beuve had accomplished such a prodigious work in universal criticism, and educated so many Frenchmen to efficiency in various departments, that Scherer fails to make an impression nearly as considerable as that made by his great fore-runner. He had, in some ways, the fuller preparation. Trained as a scholar, and with actual experience as a professor, his thinking in various directions was probably more methodised than Sainte-Beuve's; and he had perhaps more scholarly perceptions of the need of systematic culture in the critic's career. But, on the other hand, we can hardly give him higher praise than to describe his critical gifts in terms of Sainte-Beuve's, and to say that he was the great critic's worthy successor.

In France, as has been suggested, he has been a less prominent literary figure, just because he came after the author of the *Causeries du Lundi*. A witty young writer, Emile Bergerat, has taken vengeance on him for an objectionable literary judgment by a fable of how he, Bergerat, irritated by the judgment in question, and wanting to know who this objectionable Scherer was, went to a book shop and asked for "All Scherer". Instantly all the shopmen in the place seized ladders, and began climbing them for volumes of Scherer. "Stop," cried the would-be purchaser, "I have a mania for second editions; give me the second editions of Scherer's books." Whereupon all the ladders were regretfully laid aside. The at-

tack is choicely French ; and probably M. Bergerat would be the last man to wish to carry his revenge any farther, or now to suggest that Scherer was not an ornament of French criticism. The range of his interests was, indeed, sufficient to leave him with a variety of unexhausted first editions. He had already made a reputation as a Protestant publicist and professor at Geneva when, his opinions developing beyond official limits, he laid aside that career ; and it was in 1863, about the age of forty-eight, that he issued the first volume of his *Studies of Contemporary Literature*, the collection of his first year's work as a critic on the *Temps*, which began to make his reputation in that walk of letters—certainly the best part of his fame. Coming at that mature age to regular journalism, he displayed a singular adaptability and freshness of touch, and a no less notable range of culture. He had received part of his education in England and Germany, and was at home in the literatures of these countries as almost no Frenchman had been before him. Mr. Arnold has made known to English readers in two essays, how telling, how unconventional, is his examination of two such classics as Milton and Goethe. One often feels the inefficacy of most foreign criticism on the poetry of any nation : even Scherer could at times make one feel it ; but if he could not have a native's perception of the incomparable verbal art of Milton, he had certainly more than a native's openness of view to

Milton's and Goethe's intellectual and artistic shortcomings. Such work as he did in these directions is creative and educative in the highest degree—shaking men out of the sleep of tradition, teaching them to see old masterpieces in the light of free reason, and thus helping to make possible new masterpieces, which can only come of the free action of new intelligence. A Paris correspondent has strangely accused Scherer of failing, for lack of intellectual breadth, to appreciate Shakspere as he appreciated Milton; but that is only another instance of the obsession of the English intelligence on the subject of Shakspere. Scherer went even further in his criticism of our epic poet than in his criticism of our dramatist: he resisted the anti-Shakspereanism of Rümelin as he did the fanatical Shakspereanism of Gervinus; he brought to bear on the subject an impartial judgment. But that, of course, is caviare to the average Englishman.

It is for Frenchmen to decide what measure of service Scherer has rendered to their literature. Of course he had his limitations. To an impartial foreign eye he seems, like Sainte-Beuve, to do strange injustice to Balzac, and—gingerly be it said—to fail to do justice to Zola. Such an accomplished man of letters is a formidable antagonist; and Scherer has said some more really effective things against Zola than perhaps anyone else has done. But his articles on that topic still carry a suggestion of the elderly gentleman who

is irritated by the new fashions, and bent on denouncing rather than on justly judging them. He has been so ill-advised as to justify his anti-Zolaism by the remark, among others, that he belongs to a certain order of society, and cannot for the life of him get up an interest in the drunkenness of a mason ; which leaves room for the inference that the critic might be induced to take a literary interest in the intoxication of a marquis. But when Scherer, himself a fine stylist, pounces on some of the stylistic crudities of Zola, he, of course, makes his point ; the only possible answer being that Zola can write powerfully though at times he writes ill, and that his worst slips may be traced to over-work. It is for Frenchmen, again, to judge as to the measure of the service rendered by Scherer to his country in its political life : a foreigner can but say that he seems to have been an influence such as is always valuable in democratic politics, and which France at present can ill spare, though of course he was not of late an energetic force. He figures for us as an intelligence never ossified by habit, too acute to lapse into blind conservatism, too wise to be extravagantly revolutionary. He has an amusing phrase about the "horrible certitude" of his younger contemporaries, from which he recoiled as he did from the scientific terminology that his early training made alien to him. He had had his period of "horrible certitude" in his youth as a Protestant professor and exegete ; he had got over that ; and for the rest

of his life he guarded an eclectic temper, brilliantly vindicated in the preface to his first series of critical studies. But in these present days his rational balance might seem to some to have in it elements of certitude, more attractive even to the scientific temper than the tempestuous zeal which at times makes the future of the Republic look uncertain. Born in the year of Waterloo, he has seen many ups and downs in French history: let us hope that he has seen the most violent.

## IV.

TENNYSON.

(1892.)

## I.

ONE thing revealed by the death of Lord Tennyson is the continued supremacy of the Poet in our intellectual life, down till his passing away. The statesman may count for more with the multitude, reckoning by heads, but among the readers of books, it is plain, the Poet has the most absolute allegiance in virtue of his function. To win supremacy he must of course be the master of his craft for his age; but if he attain to that, as Tennyson has done, he is more unquestionably the intellectual "hero" of his time than the philosopher, the man of science, or even the novelist. Perhaps Scott, who was only secondarily and on an inferior plane a poet, may have been as supreme at his death as Tennyson is seen to be at

his ; but the death of Byron was probably the more moving incident for the reading world ; and Tennyson's mastery is more unquestioned than Byron's ever was. And this means that our general culture is still for the most part on the same plane as it was sixty years ago, though there are so many signs of development on new lines. But there is an evident feeling among the more thoughtful critics that the death of Tennyson marks the end of a culture epoch ; and that after him there will be a great reconstruction of standards. When M. Daudet said that it was only Hugo who kept up the interest of Frenchmen in poetry, he exaggerated somewhat ; but it is clearly true that since Hugo it is impossible to make the Poet rank as the first man in the world of ideas for France ; and after Tennyson it will be equally impossible in England.

He has preserved the crown for poetry, so to speak, by the most unwearying, the most devoted cultivation of sheer poetic art of which literary history preserves any record. Before him, English poets with three or four exceptions had written poetry with more or less of inspired and secund carelessness. Only these three or four can be named beside him as vigilant and rigorous artists. First Milton, whose name alone will weigh equally with his ; next Pope, who was so unfortunate in his artistic ideal ; and then Gray, who was so limited in his performance. Later in the same list we should perhaps place Arnold,

whose art is so unequal, and at its best so elusive. To that group of very different artists Tennyson belongs in virtue of his artistic gift and his intense cultivation of it ; and if Milton must rank first, as the more original and wonderful genius, it is not to be denied that Tennyson's prolonged and undivided pursuit of his art has yielded the larger fruitage of beauty. With no one else is he for a moment to be compared among the poets who are above all things patient artists : his only rivals are among those who belong rather to the line of Shakspere, the poets of pure inspiration, such as Keats and Coleridge and Shelley and Wordsworth. Of course this division is only a roughly practical one. The artists have inspiration, and the more spontaneous men have even a cultus of artistic discipline : thus Herrick is a born artist, of careless fecundity ; and Keats and Coleridge and Wordsworth in their different ways, not to speak of Shakspere, thought much about technique. But the broad difference in the nature of the successes attained is obvious ; and the special distinction of Tennyson is that he is the supreme poet of the studious type in modern times. By the consent of all good readers, he is the most perfect English poet. Many may dispute his gift, not only of thought but of free-flowing utterance, as compared not only with that of Shakspere but with that of Keats or Shelley ; but no one denies his higher level of perfectness. This is the significant thing. He has sustained the

empire of poetry thus far on into the age of science by bringing to poetry something of the spirit of science—not merely in respect of actual scientific study, which he carried further than any other poet has hitherto done, but in respect of the patient vigilance of his artistic methods.

## II.

To some readers this may look like reviving the youthful doctrine of Macaulay, that poetry tends to die out with the advance of civilisation. But that is not at all the proposition. It is rather that with the advance of culture, for one thing, poetry must needs be specialised and, as it were, distilled from the mass of matter which could be presented as poetry in simpler ages; and that, for another thing, the supremacy of the Poet must become more and more hard to maintain. What is involved in the feeling of the critics about Tennyson's death being the close of a period, is that henceforth it is much less likely that men of forcible character and intellectual bent will look to poetry as a life's career. This is what is true in Mr. Gosse's suggestion that the loss of Tennyson will operate as a discouragement to the cultivation of poetry in England, as the death of Hugo did in France. It is not that there will not be plenty of poetry written. Poetry probably becomes a more and not a less necessary mode of utterance to mankind as real knowledge advances; and its average quality necessarily becomes finer

and subtler, and not poorer. But it is true that after Tennyson no living poet will rank as a possible first in the sphere of literary performance. The best philosopher, man of science, historian, or novelist, will count for more. Thus few bookmen will put Mr. Swinburne above Mr. Morley or Mr. Meredith—not to say Mr. Froude; and Mr. Stevenson, apart from his poetry, figures for educated people as a more important literary figure than—well, Mr. Alfred Austin or Sir Edwin Arnold. There is now no English writer who can bulk so largely in the eye of educated people as Mr. Spencer. To be sure, the readjustment of standards is a very gradual process; and it would appear that many people still think highly of Mr. Lewis Morris. There are, besides, some highly accomplished men of letters, like Mr. Lang, whose standing is partly won by poetry, and who are thoroughly saturated with the spirit of the older or predominantly poetic culture. But even Mr. Lang exhibits the encroachment of the ideals of the scientific age; (it is perhaps not without significance that in laying his wreath on Tennyson's grave he exasperatingly misquotes him); and his example, like Arnold's, will lead younger men rather to keep poetry as a "passion", as Poe did, than to think of making it a career. It is the exclusive devotion to poetry that will now cease to become a likely ideal for young men of the general power of Tennyson and Browning. We are leaving the age of—I will not say the

poetic, but—the traditional instinctive or emotional way of looking at things. This will mean, not that we shall have less poetry, but that we shall have less poetry from single men, and fewer long poems of any value. Long ago Poe saw how inevitably the refining poetic art tended to brevity. Poetry will therefore be produced rather by cultured men with other interests and literary pursuits, as by Coleridge, Arnold, Poe, Mr. Stevenson, and Mr. Lang. Even Whitman, and his follower Mr. Carpenter, have written as much prose as "verse". Whether this general restriction of the art will lower the standard of workmanship is an open question. Certainly Tennyson, who published no prose, is as before said the most perfect poet. But the chances are, perhaps, that the very perfection of technique which he has impressed upon the general attention will force fastidiousness on all performers in an even increasing degree.

### III.

To look forward to a, so to speak, unprofessional pursuit of poetry may seem inconsistent with the view that poetry is becoming more and more essentially a fine art. But the case of poetry among the arts is peculiar. It is not an art by itself, from which ordinary life stands separate. It consists in lifting to the plane of metrical beauty ordinary language, which is used by all for some purposes, and which is necessarily cultivated by

thousands of prose writers with considerable artistic care. The poet works in normal language, and above all in normal ideas. It is not his business to produce new thought, but to express beautifully what thought he shares with his fellows. It is quite otherwise with the painter and the sculptor and the musical composer, whose arts are special to themselves, and not extensions of a faculty in universal use. Hence the need in their case for a more habitual cultivation of their art than is necessary to the poet as distinguished from the prose writer. The mere mechanism of verse is facile ; and to pass from the writing of prose to the writing of verse is rather like a composer's transition from symphony to song than like the attempting of painting or music by one who has not been trained to practise it.

In the case of Tennyson, however, there are circumstances which give him, as poet, a prestige such as belonged to poetry in earlier culture stages ; and it is because this special prestige must become increasingly harder to obtain that his death is likely to end a culture period. He came at a time when educated men everywhere were being forced to face anew the problems of religious belief ; and he so far dealt with these problems and the discussion of them as to be able to put certain general impressions concerning them into gravely beautiful song. This sufficed to sum up the sentiments of perhaps two out of three educated people on the subject, and these accord-

ingly saw in Tennyson a comprehensive thinker as well as an exquisite poet ; while those who were unimpressed by the philosophy could not but admit the charm of the poetry. Hence a peculiar unanimity of praise on the main issue. But as, year after year, ordinary culture embraces ever a little more careful thinking on the simpler philosophic themes, Tennyson's solutions become less capable of appealing to thoughtful people ; and men of competent culture will grow more chary of attempting to solve great problems of thought by the methods of an art whose function so obviously is to express emotion. It has been claimed for him since his death that he "led through the wilderness" a generation faced by the "desolating conclusions of modern rationalism". Such language illustrates the kind of intelligence which his philosophy impressed — a kind of intelligence incapable of looking at any problem save in terms of confused sentiment. What peace this kind of mind found in Tennyson's teaching it is not easy to understand. Of attained philosophic serenity his later verse shows little trace ; its only placid side being that of the traditional religious "hope", reverted-to temperamentally. It is presumably this attitude which is found "consoling" by those who have followed the poet's lead. If at the same time they have drunk of the bitterness into which he sank on the side of social feeling, the consolation is hardly to be envied. By fastening their minds on such of

his poetry as soothed their religious feelings, they may have retained for him that affection which it is so natural for the young to feel for the poet who gives them enchanted hours and a heritage of lovely speech. But on the other hand there must be many whose sympathies have been too rudely jarred by Tennyson's recurrent barbarisms of sentiment to permit the survival in them of more than the intellectual admiration which cannot be withheld from his art. He reverted to barbarous instincts as inevitably, in virtue of his temperament, as he held by his inherited religious sentiment ; and it is instructive to notice how these tendencies thrive together. Some have sought to make out that when he voiced barbarism and misanthropic bitterness he only expressed dramatically feelings which were not his own. The plea is vain. Few poets are more transparent than Tennyson ; and the passions of war and bigotry and conservatism which he sings are as truly his as the higher strains which made him once seem so far above the possibility of old-world malevolence. As well take away his credit as his responsibility. It was this very part in primary instinct that made him primarily and always a poet, and allowed him to be a " poet laureate " and a peer.

## IV.

Some day, perhaps, we shall have a poetry which shall breathe as melodiously the subtler sensations of a purified humanity as Tennyson did

the varying passions of a half rationalised age. But one cannot help recurring to the suggestion of Mr. Spencer, that of all the arts that which has the greatest development before it is music. That alone has the mysterious virtue of lending itself to and giving birth to all emotions in turn without stamping on itself any doctrine, seeming the most profoundly sympathetic because the most utterly undefined. Beethoven can "console" men of all ways of thinking who have the ears to hear him ; Mozart is never fallacious ; Schubert never immoral. At times it seems as if the resources of beautiful sound had been compassed ; as if after Beethoven there were no deeps to sound, and after Schubert no new extasies of melody. But the new men come with their new treasures ; Chopin lifts unsuspected veils ; all the world goes round to Wagner—for a time ; and still the new generations of wonder-workers arise. Into their hands are given the keys of feeling, because they come to feeling from its springs ; and it is only because our culture, in this country, is still so limited on the side of music as compared with poetry that we set the poets higher than the composers. Oddly, the names etymologically reverse the psychological facts, "poet" meaning "maker" or "creator" ; and "composer" meaning "one who puts together". It is rather the other way about.

And yet, taking up again the book to which the Master will add no more, we cannot if we

would renounce the old allegiance. Once more the poignant song thrills the heart-strings ; the golden cadences awake afresh the old vibrations of joy ; the glorious strains reverberate. Yes : come what may, it was great to have done all this ; and that closing picture of the dying poet, passing away while the moonlight flooded his couch through the great oriel windows and all the tapers were withdrawn, is a beautiful ending to a high life and to a poetic period.

## V.

RUSKIN.

(1900.)

THE way of grouping writers and literary movements by the century, always so illogical and often so misleading, promises to have a measure of fitness as regards our own age and country. Save for a few venerable or elderly men who, we all trust, will alike survive the century, there promises to be a generic distinction between the serious English literature of the nineteenth century and that of the twentieth. To the former have belonged a group of men of letters and of science who, much as they differed among themselves, mark an epoch, and are not blended with kindred types who promise to figure with equal prominence in the century to come. In the past thirty years there have passed away Lyell, Darwin, Grote, Tennyson, Browning, Arnold, Newman,

Mill, Carlyle, T. H. Green, George Eliot, Lewes, Huxley, and Gladstone. When the year began there remained three or four men relatively as prominent as the most prominent of these ; and now the list is less by one—or by two, if we reckon Martineau. With the death of Ruskin, the closing century appropriates to itself one more of the most significant of the English names which specialise it.

What strikes one on a retrospect of the names cited is that they nearly all belong, though in different degrees and aspects, to De Quincey's category of "the literature of power". They have counted for ideas, for convictions, for a critical pressure of some sort on the mind of their day. And now that Ruskin and Martineau have gone over to the majority, it is impossible not to ask ourselves, What is the newer "literature of power" that is to mark the beginning of the new century? Mr. Spencer, full of years and honor, with his great task substantially done, belongs to the age of the men named ; so do Mr. Meredith and Mr. Swinburne, if they are to be reckoned in the same broad category. Even Mr. Morley is over sixty. Who among the younger writers begins to count in a similar way? It is really impossible to answer. Nearly every name that suggests itself is that of some elderly writer of more or less prominence who belongs in the main to the generation of Ruskin and Arnold. It would seem as if there were going to be a marked rounding-off of

a period, leaving something like a clean slate, as regards names of the given status. We seem to be at a point of recombination, a middle place between (let us hope) two characteristic ages. Other countries—for instance Germany, France, and the United States—seem to differ from us mainly in that they have rounded off their marked period a little sooner.

Howsoever that may be, it will not be gainsaid that Ruskin is a personality without a successor, and that in a quite peculiar degree he represents the “literature of power”, though he also ranks for his age as its greatest master of prose style. He is the most typically “prophetic” of all the writers mentioned; for Carlyle, though also habitually wearing the guise, undertook to write certain histories and biographies as such; while Ruskin from first to last delivered his own soul without accepting limitary tasks. And if we have regard to definiteness of message, he is the most specific, the most earnest, of all the literary teachers of his time, outside of the ranks of political reformers specially so called. In virtue of this earnestness, and of the abnormal literary power which went with it, he has had the largest cultured audience, the largest apparent intellectual influence, exercised in his day and country. Rich to begin with—whence in part the facility with which he made his first entrance into serious literature—he is said to have been enriched anew in his old age, after losing much of his fortune, by

the revenue from the sale of his works. And yet it is hardly possible to point thus far to any practical result from his most characteristic teaching—the teaching, that is, which arraigns the whole modern ethic of idle living.

It may be that in his case, as in that of Rousseau, whom at several points he so strikingly resembles, the full influence of the teaching is to appear after his time. The main harvest of what Rousseau sowed was reaped in the French Revolution, a dozen years after his death, and a generation after he had made his first great impression. Some such posthumous power—less grievous in its procedure, let us trust—may be wielded by the doctrine of Ruskin; but he himself, twenty years ago, bitterly protested that his countrymen did not heed him; and though he has been critically acclaimed again and again in recent years it would be hard indeed to show any movement on his main lines. The movements which most seemed to reflect him have for the time rather lost than gained ground.

In explanation of this, it might appear reasonable to conclude that Ruskin has been read as literature, for his splendor of style, rather than as doctrine or precept. Broadly speaking, he ranks in literature as at once an eminent writer on art and an eminent humanist or teacher of conduct; but year by year it seems to be more and more generally agreed-on that as an art critic he is not really competent; that his relation to art was

not properly artistic ; and that what he did was to propound wrong or half-true ideas in incomparable rhetoric. His own art-work, indeed, reveals his deficiency. The best of it is exquisitely accurate line-copying, either from architecture or from nature ; and his main art gospel always was that the highest art consists in exquisite accuracy of detailed reproduction. The early photographic work of Millais, the minute distinctness of Meissonnier, and the realism of Miss Thompson, seem to have appealed to him more than anything else since Turner ; and Turner he justified in all sorts of ways that Mr. Hamerton's criticism showed to be mistaken. For the rest, he was constantly bringing into art-judgment a variety of misplaced ethical considerations ; and when he met, in Whistler, an art of which the truth and mastery lay in suffusion and not in detail, he condemned it in a way that definitely condemned himself. Yet it was on the strength of his earlier works on art that he became famous ; his style sufficing to carry all before it with the majority of cultured readers. Did the same thing happen with his sociological writing ?

The true answer, I think, is that however much his literary magic may have counted for in the latter case, the processes were not on all fours. Critically speaking, the ornate and redundant style of 'Modern Painters' is not finally admirable ; it is often overwrought, unchaste, and viciously self-conscious. There need be no hesitation in saying

what he himself said, on re-reading his work with a matured judgment. "Mostly boiled to rags" is his terse estimate of a quantity of much-labored prose which he and his readers had once thought magnificent. Yet that lavish rhetoric of his youth was a vice possible only to a great faculty; and in the strenuous pains he then took to write with splendor lay the training which enabled him later to write the most perfectly vital and beautiful prose without self-consciousness and without miscalculation. Thus his social doctrine, which mainly belongs to his later period, is admirably written, where his art criticism had only seemed so; and if the later teaching fascinated in virtue of its style, it has on the whole fascinated better judges.

Furthermore, whereas his æsthetic criticism is astray because he brought to æsthetics a non-artististic preparation and temper, howbeit with a passion for accurate vision and reproduction, he later came to his true task when he turned his faculty of vision and reproduction to the statement of the physical and moral deformity of the existing social system. Thus the man is in the long run all of a piece. His real basis or genius was not æsthetic proper but moral æsthetic; for he was no more an educated moralist than an educated artist; but his genius for recognition and statement, misapplied in his youthful art-criticism, ripened on the moral side and found an incomparable application in the attack upon evil life-conditions and the piercing cry for a better way.

It has been said of him—as he once said of himself—that his bias was really scientific ; but this, I think, is an error of classification. Vividness of recognition and reproduction is a great aid to the man of science ; but his specific quality is his patience in comparison and inference ; his loyalty to the Canon of Consistency ; his impassive reception of all the evidence. Now, Ruskin had patience in studying or doing zealously whatever he cared about ; but he never regarded consistency ; and no man has committed more or worse self-contradictions. What wrought in him was the genius of first thoughts, not of second thoughts ; and where he is supreme is where he instantly and once for all sees in a flash a whole catena of error and ugliness and absurdity in the industrial and moral life, and fixes and arraigns it for ever. The process is finally much more artistic than scientific ; but it is artistic on the side of the moral sense still more than on the side of the physical.

There is no use in going on lamenting that a man of genius was not "made different" ; but in correction of the view that he had the scientific mind it must be said that had it been so he could not have fallen into the fallacies which stand over against his truths : the dogma that men are to be morally elevated by being forever in political subjection ; that all women's lives are fitly to be shaped by men's sentiment ; that hereditary monarchy is nobly beautiful and war nobly moralising.

The grossness of his error on the latter head is such that it alone might account for the frustration of all his teaching. He told the English people on the one hand that they were a "rotten mob of money-begotten traitors", and on the other hand that war is the way for them to sift out their best heads and hearts. They assimilated his evil teaching without the good; and it may be left to posterity to say whether their latest obedience to it is making them any less deserving of the vituperation aforesaid.

No man who thought out his sociology in a scientific spirit at this time of day could fall into Ruskin's perversities. They stand for the primary element in him of passionate waywardness, of which the final expression or index was his derangement. Other men had put true ideals where he put false; and he might have learned from them—so we are fain to say—if he would. But here again comes into prominence the infinite perversity of things. Among those who saw right where he saw wrong were men wedded to the errors which he most conclusively exposed. And so we have Ruskin shattering with sheer logic Mill's fatal fallacy as to the nature of saving, and capital, and consumption; and Mill putting just and high views of the development of human personality where Ruskin vends pernicious old dogmas of feudalism and barbarism. The essential vice of his constructive as distinct from his critical counsel is that it always rests on an ideal of

general subjection to *his present taste*, and never fairly faces the inevitableness of variation in any world of free men.

In the end, one hopes, the good doctrine must needs swallow up the evil. If any society *can* once realise in its thought the force of Ruskin's impeachment of the system under which the few live on the toil of the many, yielding no service in return ; while half the toil of the many is a mutual frustration—if once that lesson be learned, those taught cannot conceivably take Ruskin's insane counsel about war, or his fantastic precepts about class and caste. The spirit of justice, once brought to a new birth, cannot yield the old fruits of the very spirit of greed and injustice it was invoked to slay. And while the evil eulogy of blind passion, by its crass sophistry, revolts the very faculty of judgment in those who at this point use it, the merciless exposure of the ills of the other blind passion of self-seeking which shapes the life of "industrial peace" is such as no eye can take in without some shock of new perception. The Ruskin of the better days is admirably exemplified in one of the passages quoted by Mr. J. A. Hobson in his comprehensive and discriminating monograph. It is an ironical address to working men on their faults as viewed by their "betters", that Ruskin writes :

" Meantime, the Bishop, and the Rector, and the Rector's lady, and the dear old Quaker spinster who lives in Sweetbriar Cottage, are *so* shocked that you drink so

much, and that you are such horrid wretches that nothing can be done for you! and you mustn't have your wages raised because you *will* spend them in nothing but drink. And to-morrow they are all going to dine at Drayton Park, with the brewer who is your member of Parliament, and is building a public-house at the railway station, and another in the High Street, and another at the corner of Philpott's Lane, and another by the stables at the back of Tunstall Terrace, outside the town, where he has just bricked over the Dovesbourne, and filled Buttercup Meadows with broken bottles; and, by every measure, and on every principle of calculation, the growth of your prosperity is established." (*Fors Clavigera*, Letter 23.)

Thus does the seer write when he has his eye truly on the object, taking in at a flash all its concrete and moral implications. It is when he is wandering in the abstractions of a theological ethic, remote from life and actuality, that he can propose as cure for such a state of things a resort to a process of wholesale mutual murder—telling illiterate Britons, bare, by his own account, of all their moral birthright, that they can ennable themselves by living the squalid and mindless life of the camp, to the end of making carrion of an equal number of hapless creatures on the other side. It is hard to conceive that those who have ears to hear his wisdom can tolerate his folly, or can fail to see that here he writes in absolute ignorance or disregard of every relevant historic fact.

However that may be, we are left facing the fact that his very worst ideas are now in the ascendant and his best apparently forgotten. So far his punishment is complete enough; for he was never a man to exult in a bloodshed that visibly

did less than nothing to purify the sordid life he so detested. And the worst of it is that whereas he could never have won his standing but for his better and truer teaching, there is nobody with anything like his fire and force to carry on that, while there are a hundred empty reverberators of his error. Haply it may be that the teachers of the future are to be less dynamic in virtue of a greater sanity and circumspection, a breadth of philosophy that shall preclude his ecstatic self-confidence, which comes so near the temper of the fanatical priest of all ages.\* It belongs to the genius of storm and stress to frustrate half its own endeavor,

“Like some fierce thing replete with too much rage,  
Whose strength’s abundance weakens its own heart.”

Wherever we turn in Ruskin we find passionate error shouldering passionate truth ; fantastic prescription joined to acute diagnosis ; ignorant presumption alongside of perfect perception ; blindness following upon the vividest vision ; unpardonable insolence alternating with demands for a “ reverence ” which is worse than worthless if it be not a habitual reciprocity of consideration, an unvarying recognition of the rights of every per-

\* In his ‘Time and Tide’, Ruskin shows a very fair appreciation of the religious problem as regards belief in the Bible, virtually rejecting any theory of inspiration which puts it apart from earnest ethical literature in general. But on the question of Theism or Providence he is fundamentally commonplace, idly accusing of insensitiveness those who see his views to be unintelligent.



sonality that does not itself make wanton aggression.

The defects, doubtless, belong to the qualities ; and the part of wise admirers is, not to burke the blemishes—that merely protracts the battle—but loyally to acknowledge them, and so set up not another impossible master for adoration, but a spiritual body of his wisdom, purified by his error. As a man, he will not sustain idolatry : as a prophet, he will finally yield as much gold, in absolute quantity, as any of his species in his age ; and there is no golden speech so beautiful as his. Had he joined with his matchless faculty of phrase an equal measure of sanity and science, he would have outshone all other teachers of all time. As it is, he began by being the most gifted and strenuous, and ended by being the most consummate, of all the masters of English prose in his century. Whatever, then, may be in store at the hands of the writers of the century coming, his highest message cannot be more than temporarily put aside. Men will return to it, whether to act upon it or to despair.